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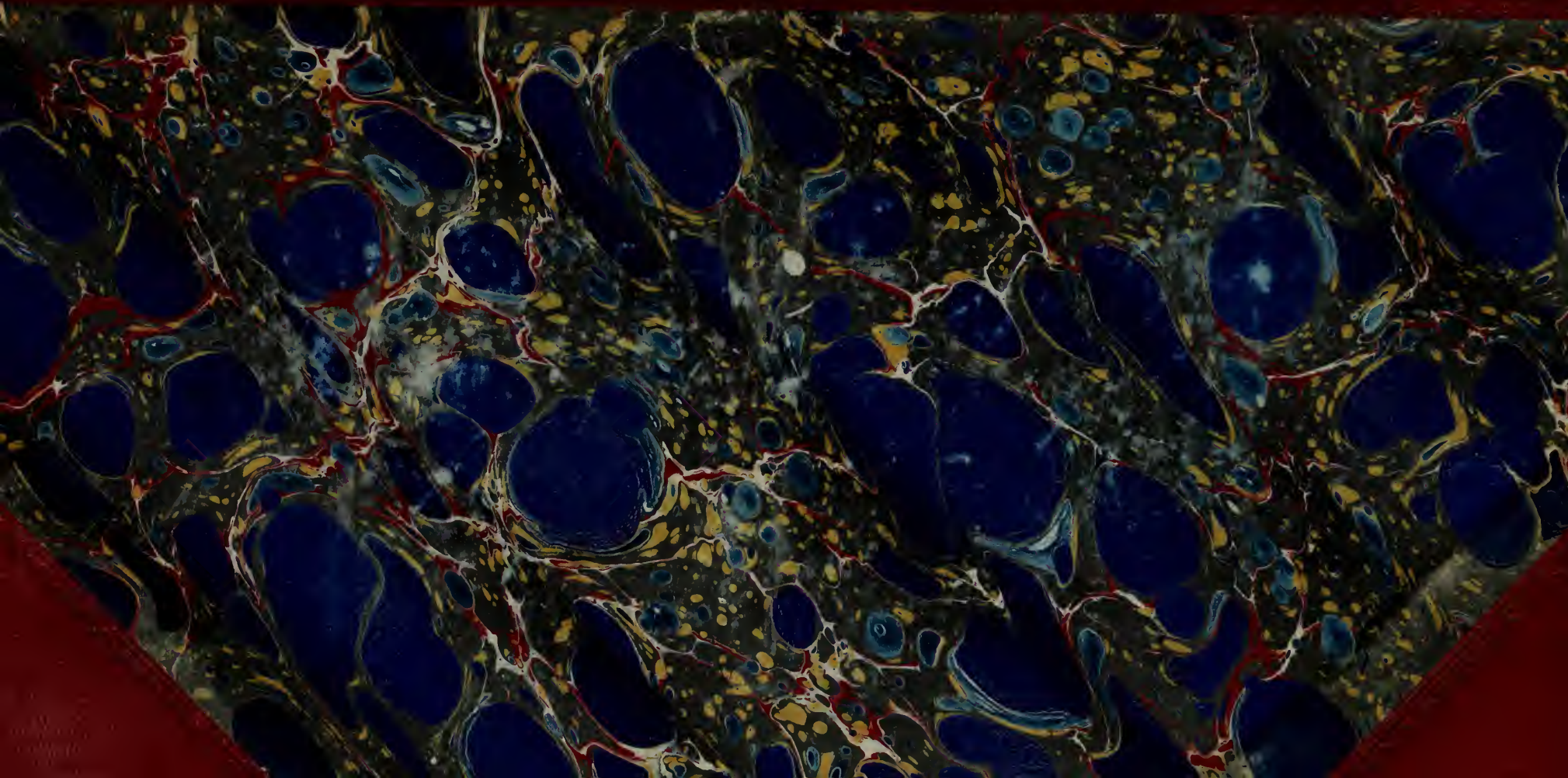

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M. L. GOW. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

SHE ROSE WITH ONE SWIFT LIGHT MOVEMENT AND ADVANCED, HER HAND OUTSTRETCHED.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XLI.

January to June, 1886.

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"She rose with one swift, light movement."
"Watch for the Seven of Spades"
"The Seven of Spades."
"'Stay,' cried an imperative voice, 'he must not go.'"
"He and Hester hurried to the west porch."
"A Witch's Brew."

Illustrations to "Under Northern Skies."

Portrait of Franz Liszt.

THE ARGOSY.

JANUARY, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRD OF ILL OMEN.

THE month was May, the day Whit-Monday, and the hour by St. Olave's clock half-past two, when the mid-day express from Dover steamed slowly into London Bridge Station, between the densely-crowded platforms.

"We shall not be more than half-an-hour late at Charing," observed a passenger in one of the first-class compartments, with an air of cheerful surprise. "Not bad that for a Bank Holiday."

"Bank Holiday?" echoed his fellow-traveller; "why so it is! Whit-Monday, of course."

If he had had any doubts of the fact the many-coloured posters that met his gaze as he turned impatiently to the window might have convinced him. He got up and looked out, up and down the platform, at them and at the crowd that surged once or twice up to the carriage he was in, but passed on, being mostly composed of second and third-class travellers. He drew back again, seeing a woman, as he thought, about to enter; and dropped into his seat with a look of intense annoyance, which melted into a slightly puzzled expression.

He was puzzled, in fact, at his own annoyance. He had made sure that one Monday was as good as another for his errand in town, and now in some remote corner of his brain there up-started a suggestion that the date was against him somehow, and for all he should get by coming he might as well have stayed at Shorncliffe. An exasperating, undefined little suggestion, that refused to let him catch it and examine it closely.

"I declare I had forgotten all about it," he answered the old gentleman who had addressed him, and who was looking at him with some interest.

He was a pleasant young fellow to look at. Tall and well set-up, with honest blue eyes: *young* eyes, that looked straight at you, and didn't care how much you read in them; a sunburnt, fair face, and curly, light moustache; manifestly military, apart from the evidence of the

hat-case in the rack above him, lettered "E. Poynter, Esq., the Royal Denbigh Regt." His companion looked as unmistakably civilian; stout, and bald, and grey; clad in garments of a City cut, with the *Money Market Review* sticking out of his pocket, and the *City Press* between his knees.

He eyed the young fellow amicably for a moment longer before speaking.

"Ah, I expect you army men are too well accustomed to holidays to make much account of an extra one or two. Six weeks' leave once a month, eh?"

Poynter laughed good-humouredly.

"I suppose that is the British taxpayers' view of us. I can only say for myself that I work hard enough for every day's leave I get. Why, I've been trying to get off by this very train every Monday for the last two months, and never succeeded till to-day."

He made an impatient movement as again the aggravating little imp of a doubt frolicked across his brain and was gone before it could be identified.

"Ay, ay! Well now, what have you been doing that you couldn't get away before?" asked the old gentleman, facing him squarely, with a look of genuine interest. "Mustering and marching, pipe-claying and starching, eh?"

"Something of the kind," Poynter admitted, "or worse—musketry. I'm an Instructor, you see." He spoke in the year of grace '82. "Any other fellow might have managed it easily. The first Monday after she asked me—I mean, you know, after I came back from leave at Easter," and he coloured up to his hat-brim—"it was pouring: sleet, hail, cats and dogs; and it would have looked odd—I mean, it would have been no good coming up to town then. Though it turned out a glorious evening," he ended, injuredly to himself.

"That's only one Monday. What about the other five?"

"Next Monday the Duke came down. Next, I got the men paraded early, and just as we reached the ranges up came a sea-fog like a blanket, keeping us dodging about for half-an-hour waiting to see if it would blow off; and when it did the targets were wet, and—well, I lost that morning. Then, a court martial—they had no business to put me on, but they did. Last Monday a shower in the middle of the shooting. There it is, you see." And he ended the bead-roll of his aggravations with an exasperated sigh.

"And no other train would suit?"

"Not one. Not for me to get to South Kensington soon after four."

The old gentleman had been fumbling in his pocket-book for the last few minutes. He here extracted a card, and handed it to him, saying:

"Next holiday you get I hope you will find time to come and see me, as you will most likely be in the neighbourhood."

Poynter read, "General Sir John Archdale, K.C.M.G.," and coloured

again under his sunburn. "Too bad of you to draw me out about your own shop, Sir John. I'm—" searching for his card-case.

"Poynter, of my old regiment. I read it up there," interrupted Sir John, pointing with a Gampish umbrella to the hat-case; "and, if I am not very much mistaken, son of Welbore Poynter, that I knew in '52 in the Black Sea?"

"That's my uncle. His son is in the Rifle Brigade: Edric Poynter, same name as mine."

"Confounded nuisance that sometimes. I used to find it so, I know. Will you dine with us to-day? Lady Archdale will excuse your dress."

"Thanks. I hardly know—I may be kept late—at a friend's," Edric hesitated.

"Next time, then," said the shabby old General, whose eyes had twinkled amusedly once or twice; and collecting his papers he got out at Cannon Street, leaving Edric alone with his meditations.

"Bank Holiday! What *was* it she said about Bank Holiday? The idea of my forgetting a single word of hers! She said nothing when she gave me her card, I know; except "Then I shall expect to see you."

"Six Mondays ago!" he went on, "What must she think of me? Nothing at all most likely. Why should she? I've let all this time go without ever reminding her of my existence. I daresay she has forgotten all about me. I wish I had written, but I don't see quite what I could have said.

"She did mean that she really hoped to see me. That's what everybody says, though. A social fib, like 'Not at Home.' No! It isn't in her to look at one with those clear eyes of hers and smile—as she did—if it were only a way of dismissing me civilly when she had done with me."

Here the poor youth, who, it may be observed, was in a very bad way, took to gazing for comfort and reassurance on a bit of limp pasteboard. "Mrs. Noel Damien, 25, St. Maur Road, South Kensington," it bore, with "At Home every Monday, 4 to 6," scrawled beneath in faint, rather sea-sick characters.

It had lived in some inner recess of his waistcoat ever since Mrs. Damien put it into his hand on the Folkestone steamer as their memorable journey together drew to its close. He had run over to Paris on a few days' leave at Easter, as dozens of other young fellows had done before. He had met with the most every-day party of travelling companions on his homeward way; an invalid lady with a friend, a maid, an unconscionable amount of luggage, and a Maltese dog. He had only done as anybody else might have done in coming forward to air his chivalry and his French when the maid, the invalid, the luggage, and the Maltese all fell into distinct and separate difficulties on the way. He had plunged in fact into a perfect sea of commonplace and brought out a pearl—a priceless gem. He had

obeyed the summons of an imperious, fidgetty, ungrateful old woman, and lo, his reward in the smiles of a goddess! A nineteenth century goddess, with her divinity shining from under a costly fur cloak and be-plumed hat, who had thanked him for his aid with such eyes and voice as had never before greeted mortal senses; had smitten him speechless and stupid with the beatitude of her presence all the way to Boulogne, and carried off half his life with her when she bade him adieu on Folkestone pier; leaving him to watch the retreating train with an utterly new and forlorn sense of loss and deprivation, only endurable by the thoughts of the next blissful Monday.

Next Monday; and that was two months ago.

Charing Cross at last. He secured the talismanic card with very different treatment from that accorded to Sir John Archdale's, and jumped out on to the platform into a good-tempered hustling mob of holiday makers. He hurried off to the cloak-room with his hat-box and overcoat, and back again in time to secure the last hansom on the rank.

A woman who had been following him hurried forward and intercepted him.

"I hailed you first!" she addressed the cabman, indignantly. "You must take me, not him."

"Come now! I never saw you. Move off, and let the gentleman get in."

She turned sharply round on Edric.

"I beg of you, sir, to give up to me. It is an errand of life or death. I pray you to help me!"

She clasped her hands beseechingly with a sudden un-English gesture that made Edric look at her curiously, despite his vexation at the hindrance. His first glance showed a plainly dressed, dark woman, neither old nor young; one of the dozens who pass by in the streets every day; dressed in a long cloak with a red lining and a plain straw bonnet with an eager face beneath it. His second glance took in the marked points of the face, the waxy-pale hue with the dusky bloom on the cheeks, the rippling blue-black hair, and the long, half-closed eyes of that blank blackness that repels enquiry like a shuttered window. Her hands were short and plump; not working woman's hands; the fingers sharply pointed at their dusky tips; the skin velvety.

"Life or death!" she repeated, clasping them again, and reading his face with that intent expressionless gaze of hers. Her voice only was urgent and distressful.

"But I have a pressing engagement too, my good woman. Not exactly life or death, but important in its way," Edric expostulated. Cabby disposed of the case promptly.

"Hi! Four-wheeler! There you are, Missis. Now, sir, if you please. '25, St. Maur Road?' Is that near the Cromwell Road, sir? all right!" and they were off and bowling westwards before the strange woman had stirred from her post on the platform.

Edric felt her eyes on him to the last, with a queer fancy that it would have been well for him to have seen her depart first. The meeting left on him much the same sensation as that with which, in a lower walk of life, he would have been brought up to regard the croak of a raven, the flight of a lone magpie, or the crossing of his path by a black cat. Of course he might have averted the omen by crossing himself, throwing his left thumb over his right shoulder, or making two little horns with his fore and little fingers, Neapolitan fashion, if he had known how, but he didn't.

So merely including the incident in the general contrariness of things that day, he went on his way with the evil omen—if omen it were—unaverted.

It seemed a long half hour to St. Maur Road, lengthened by a mistake of the driver, whom in his impatience Edric paid and dismissed, and then wasted another quarter trying to find his way on foot to the house. He felt as if he ought to have made straight for it by instinct, instead of blundering across to the wrong side of the street as he did. Recrossing he studied the aspect of No. 25, anxiously. He fancied he could recognise the tokens of Mrs. Damien's presence everywhere; in the rich gold and bronze and cream tints of lace and brocade seen through the half-open window; in the gay display of flowers; surest of all in the great silver bowl heaped high with roses that seemed to smile a welcome to him.

The roses—ah! the roses! Had he not safely cherished amongst his most precious possessions one of their fellows, which she had herself bestowed on him; and had he not enriched the Folkestone florist by a reckless daily expenditure on rosebud buttonholes every day of his life since?—the cognizance of his fair Queen Rose.

Still his heart seemed to sink as he noted a sort of neglected, abandoned air about the place. His knock was unregarded, and fell hollow as on an empty house. A forbidding-looking, elderly female, watering some plants in the area, looked up at him with some astonishment as the bell sounded; and a younger and more attractive one, who had been lounging in the window beside the roses, disappeared; and after an interval reappeared in answer to his summons, breathlessly adjusting her cap.

"Not at home. Missis is down in the country," she announced before he had time to make the enquiry, smiling and shaking her head. "It's Bank 'Oliday," she added by way of explanation.

If the proper official had been there to receive his card with the regulation neutral aspect and formula, there the matter would have ended and the street door shut; but this girl was so evidently a deputy and new to the work, that Edric ventured to relieve his feelings by fruitless expostulation.

"I thought Mrs. Damien was always at home on Mondays."

"Never as I'm aware, sir. We're all out to-day. The upper housemaid and Mr. Jenifer and Miss Cadogan's maid—only me

and cook left to keep house; and we aren't on terms and don't speak."

And the young woman bestowed a coquettish glance on Edric with such evident delight in the occasion of employing her conversational powers that he had no scruple in enquiring:

"When do you expect Mrs. Damien back? To-day?"

"I beg your pardon—Mrs. *who* did you say, sir?"

"Your mistress—Mrs. Damien."

The girl's eyes opened their widest. "Never heard of any such person here, sir. This is Miss Cadogan's house, and has been as long as I've been in her service—though we spend most of our time at our place in the country."

"But surely," and Edric searched for the card and looked at it in bewilderment, "this is 25, St. Maur Road? Is there another St. Maur Road, or another 25 in this one?"

The girl shook her head.

"Did any lady of the name of Damien ever live here, or near here? Is it any use enquiring at any of the other houses?"

"I don't think so, sir. But I can't say for certain. I only came up from the country last week myself. This has been Miss Cadogan's town address for the last two years, I know. Cook has been here before, but you'll excuse me from asking her anything, she being every bit as much of a new comer as myself." This last in a raised voice, evidently intended for the area.

Edric looked at the card again, and at the house, and at the girl. She, interested and sympathetic, raised herself on tip-toe to make out the address for herself over his shoulder.

"It's odd, sir, isn't it, to be looking at one's own house on another person's card? There's been some mistake in the printing, *I* should say. You might ask at the shops—if you can find any open; or a policeman, or the post-office."

He thanked her, and to her manifest regret departed, leaving her in the chartered freedom of "Bank 'Oliday," standing on the door-step, gazing down the street, her arms rolled in her apron.

The shops, as she suggested, were closed, but he found a post-office that was also a chemist's, open, and a civil and unoccupied proprietor ready to assist him. He had wondered, at first impatiently, how the mistake could possibly have arisen, but when all the assistance that could be rendered by the civil chemist and the post office directory proved of no avail; when no other possible "No. 25, St. Maur" anything could be found in the district, and no Mrs. Noel Damien anywhere, his wonderment grew to blank despair.

A private November fog of his own seemed to close around him, putting out the sunshine and making earth hideous. He ran over the circumstances in his mind as he sat turning the leaves of the over-grown red volume in fruitless search, from "Court" to "Streets" and from "D's" to possible "Noels" in fruitless search. "I can't set the

police after her. I can't start on a house-to-house visitation all round South Kensington," he growled, in rising wrath. "I'll do one or the other before I'll give in, though." The situation felt so impossible—so absurd—as he was dimly conscious in the midst of his exasperation.

If she had seemed for a moment to belong to the class to whom a fancy name or address may now and then be a temporary necessity—the thought was profanation! Even if he could have entertained it for a moment, was there not her travelling companion and relative, a Countess—most unmistakably a Countess—and mother of an Earl, well known to Edric and everybody else, by reputation at least.

The Countess of Monchalsea. A disagreeable, viperous-tongued, thankless old woman, who had ordered him up to her aid as if he had been a courier, and would have dismissed him as coolly when she no longer needed him, if Mrs. Damien would have permitted it. An old lady on whose help he felt he could not count for a minute, but who rose in his recollection as an angel of light at this juncture. Back to the directory with feverish haste: M—Mar—Mon—Monchalsea. Only the Earl's residence was to be found, and that, as the postmaster happened to know, was let for the season to the Siamese Embassy.

Augusta Charlotte, dowager Countess of Monchalsea, evidently possessed no town house of her own.

There the trail ended for the present. Edric made some random purchases from the stock of the obliging official, and stepped forth into the street slowly and heavily. What had happened? What had bewitched her, thus suddenly, out of his reach? Some unforeseen change of plans? Had she returned to America? He knew how little Americans make of the crossing of the ferry, and some sudden call or some sudden distaste for England might have sent her back to her mother's people. Or she might not have gone even so far. There were plenty of places which she might fancy to visit in England—What did that old woman say about Monchalsea?

Monchalsea! The word made him start and stop. Her son's place in Lincolnshire, she called it. Of course, he saw it all now! Match-making, manœuvring old harpy. He had detested that old woman from the first, and now he knew why. She was already assuming the airs of a mother-in-law, he seemed to remember, and Mrs. Damien laughed and tolerated her. He had actually let her be carried off before his eyes; why hadn't he stuck to the party, followed her, besieged her, insisted on telling her all that he—that everybody knew about Lord Monchalsea? Or no, he didn't fancy himself doing that; nor could he exactly, on so short an acquaintance, call attention to the superior quality of the devotion he was prepared to offer.

But there! never mind what he ought to have done; the fact remained that he had done nothing, and he stopped with a short angry laugh, and then strode on faster than ever, as if to out-walk his vexation.

His luck! his detestable luck! If he could but have cursed himself for any neglect of a chance or want of energy in seizing it, it

would have been a relief, but that was denied him. It had been fate; blind impassive fate; hopeless to assail or circumvent, that had stood between him and his chance of happiness, and he ground his teeth at the sense of his impotence.

He brought himself to a stop at last; he had got somehow to Kensington Gardens in his aimless course; holiday-makers were there as everywhere, and many turned to look curiously after the tall young gentleman, striding along so furiously and scowling so blackly, and he brought himself to with a laugh, as he recognised his own melodramatic aspect. Mrs. Damien's card was still in his hand, and with a burst of somewhat childish petulance he tore it across and flung it away, and then wished he could, with any dignity, turn and stop to collect the scattered pieces. As it was he made for the long, shady, horse-chestnut avenue, and walked slowly on, seeking for a vacant seat where he could rest, and consider quietly whether there was anything left for him to do but to go back to Camp by the next train.

CHAPTER II.

HOW EDRIC'S FORTUNE WAS TOLD IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

Edric found himself, on reflection, in the position described in the language of the mills as "at a loose end."

He had no friends in town just then: the remnant of the afternoon left him was too scanty to expend in going farther a-field. The observances of the day were against his seeking even the last two resources of the unoccupied—getting his hair cut or interviewing his tailor. He remembered Sir John Archdale's invitation. Affectionate traditions of the good old colonel's deeds and oddities still lingered in the Royal Denbigh, and, even in Edric's mood of direst chagrin, he felt that life had room for one vexation the more when he found that card and address had gone from him for ever.

He searched card-case and pockets in vain; unconscious that while he was doing so a dark figure slowly passed between him and the sunshine, and paused. It had been but a faint wavering shaft of light that had flickered down on him from between the green boughs above, but the loss of it seemed to send a strange thrill through him, and he shivered involuntarily in the shadow. "Someone walking over my grave," he thought, jesting with himself, "or kissing my sweetheart," and the north country version sent a second shiver through him.

Then replacing in his pocket-book the cards and letters he had been fruitlessly turning over, he for the first time raised his eyes, as the edge of a red-lined cloak swept across the field of his down-bent vision. Standing face to face with him, was the woman he had parted from an hour before at Charing Cross.

He was a kindly, courteous young fellow in the main, but just then he regarded this bird of ill-omen with sentiments much akin to those

of Nebuchadnezzar when he ordered his Chaldeans to be cut in pieces as a last satisfaction.

She kept her pleading gaze fixed on him, despite his stare of wrathful astonishment, and approached him humbly, extending her hands with a deprecating gesture.

"I ask your pardon, sir," she began, with a gentle, insinuating intonation that gave to the last curt monosyllable the deferential grace that an Oriental can throw into "Sahib" or an Italian into "Eccellenza!" "I am truly ashamed that I came to annoy you. I was then so miserable that I did not think what I was doing. Will you not pardon me?"

Edric uttered a gruff "Oh, it's all right. It didn't matter;" looking away from her as he spoke.

She dropped her hands submissively and stood silent; so still and silent that he could not refrain from looking again.

"Thank you!" she said, softly, bowing her head and turning to go.

Edric felt himself to be a brute. "I hope you got on all right with your errand," he constrained himself to say, not too graciously.

She turned back with a look of surprise at his condescension. "How good of you to ask! Yes, I did my work in time. But I am very, *very* weary," and she sank on the far end of the bench.

Edric replaced his card-case, and rose with a cool nod and "Good-day," but as he did so she sprang up too, looking abashed.

"Ah! What was I doing? I should have known you would not like it. I am going away—quite away, instantly."

"No, no! Don't bother," Edric answered her, impatiently. "Why should you go, or I object? I'm going away myself, don't you see? Going home as fast as I can."

"Yes, going back as you came. The pity of it!" Edric heard her murmur, in a clear, low tone, intended for him if addressed to herself, with, he indignantly imagined, a sting of mockery in it.

He looked at her sharply. Her hands had dropped on her lap, her eyelids were still humbly lowered, but the corner of her lips were quivering with some unspoken gibe. At another moment he might have seen that it was his best and most dignified course to pass on unheeding, but he was exasperated out of all reasonableness just then—consumed with a wild impatience to "take it out of" somebody.

"What have you to do with my affairs?" he demanded, roughly. "I suppose you have been following me?"

She remained exasperatingly silent, her head drooping lower; but her eyes and lips flashed one derisive smile at him and were instantly composed into submissive gravity.

"What do you mean by it? What do you expect to get by it?" he asked, though conscious that he was making a false move in doing so.

"Nothing," she replied, while again that curious, secret smile

played over her lips; "if you intend to go away at once without listening to me."

"Why should I listen to you?" was the not unnatural question.

"Because it's worth your while," she answered him, promptly. "Because I can serve you as no one else in the world can. Because—" and she drew in her lips and gave an odd, meaning, backwards shake of her forefinger before her face as she spoke—"it is decreed that you shall hear me. Your star is my star. Your fortune is my fortune. They are linked together, try to part them as you may. What! you are angry and unbelieving? You will go your own way and take nothing at my hands—neither good nor evil? Go, then. Defy, if you will, the power that has brought us face to face here—and bide the end."

Her dark glance was levelled full at Edric's perturbed face now. Her extended forefinger pointed to his breast as if it were a magnet; her voice was low, solemn and passionless.

"Mad," thought Edric, a little nervously, impressed in spite of himself. "It's a swindle of some sort," was his next conclusion. "Perhaps she's a fortune-teller or a spirit medium," was his final reflection, combining the two foregoing ones. "Thank you, I think I will take my chance," he said, with somewhat forced lightness. "If it's all settled beforehand, I don't see what good I can do you, or you me."

"Go!" repeated the woman in the same deep, calm voice, that sounded, nevertheless, charged with warning or menace. "Go; pass on with a jest. Pass on to a life of bitter, fruitless grieving for the fortunate moment that has passed you by for ever. Farewell!"

Her hand dropped suddenly, she shrouded herself in her mantle, and bent her dark eyes gloomily on the ground.

He lingered irresolute. "You profess to know a good deal about me. Are you a professional prophetess?"

"I don't advertise and offer to tell your character and the colour of your future wife's hair and eyes in return for two shillings' worth of stamps, initials sixpence extra, if that is what you understand by a professional," she answered, with a sudden change of tone to good-humoured contempt. "I have done a little business in my time with the magic crystal and the divining rod, but that was in my good days in Paris, at fifty francs the consultation. It was only by way of experiment; and when I found the truth wasn't considered sufficient value for the money, I gave up—being honest," and she laughed frankly at Edric's puzzled face.

"Fifty francs! that sounds a good deal. Do you really think you could tell me, for instance, anything that it would be worth two sovereigns for me to know?"

"You know that best yourself," she answered, relapsing into her first tone of grave earnestness. "I have offered you my help freely without bargain, and it must be accepted as freely. I have never

tried to read your past, nor your future fate, except as it is written on your brow, and as your life-path is crossed by mine."

Edric frowned, punched holes in the gravel with his stick, looked up, looked down, and gave his moustache a savage screw; all of which the woman noted from her corner into which she had withdrawn again, like a knowing old spider, who sees the fly is saving her the trouble of entangling it in the web, and can afford to wait and watch the event with grim neutrality.

"I don't understand what you want me to do," he said at last, weakly parleying. "Just to listen to you, you said. Well, I have been listening to you. Have you anything more to say to me? or what else do you want?"

"Belief." And again the dark eyes flashed up into his. "Oh, I know it is a great thing I am asking, and you are a cautious people. You do right to question and mistrust. How can I, a poor stranger crossing your path at what you call hazard, hope to prove to you all you have to gain from me, and all I have to gain from you, too?"

"Ah, that's the point," said Edric, unaccountably relieved by the lower level on which the last few words placed the case.

It is not in human nature to distrust the frank avowal of a low motive. Benevolence, Self-sacrifice, Sense of Duty must all produce their credentials before they can be accepted as possible sources of action; but Self-interest, Hatred, Greed have only to give their names boldly to be welcomed without further question. So *she* was the person to be ultimately benefited! Edric laughed to himself, re-assured and good-humouredly contemptuous, and resumed his seat, feeling that now he had something tangible to go upon.

"That's the point. You offer me your help, and expect mine in return. Now that's a rather vague arrangement. You must first convince me that your help is worth something to me, and then make it plain what you want as its price."

She looked even colder and more impassive as she listened, though a gleam of satisfaction shone in her veiled eyes, and a suppressed sigh of relief, as if some dangerous crisis was safely passed, struggled through her closed lips.

"You shall yourself fix the worth of my knowledge, when you have made your profit of it. I drive no bargain. Believe in me; that is all I ask. Give me your hand," she commanded abruptly, and he extended it obediently. "Look at the lines here. See how the main lines run, and how the lesser ones meet and cross and interlace. Now look at mine. The same pattern, is it not? Just so far as the line of life. No, you need not look there," for Edric had outspread his right palm, and was endeavouring to compare it with the other. "*That* is changed and refashioned every day by your work, by your will, of which it is but the agent. The left hand alone carries your life's secrets. It is a good hand," she mused, "and a fortunate. I

read happy chances, honours and rewards, and prosperous love ; but there are dangers ——"

"I've heard all that before from a gipsy," interrupted Edric, who was fast regaining his usual composure. "I'd forgotten it, though. I'm to live till eighty, and die a general."

"And she told you to watch for the coming of a dark woman, and that your luck was to come with the number Twenty-nine—if she was worth her money," concluded the strange woman, calmly.

"By Jove! She did. No ; you're out in one thing," triumphantly. "She never said Twenty-nine at all. I remember that distinctly. She said Five."

"Because she only knew the month, and not the day. She was right so far, you see."

Edric sat in disconcerted silence. There was no disputing the calendar. It was the very day once commanded by Act of Parliament to be "kept holy for ever," in commemoration of "the unspeakable mercies" vouchsafed to this kingdom by the restoration of his then "most Gracious Majesty," as Edric's mother's old prayer-book put it. The 29th of May, beyond all question.

"It is but a poor and uncertain message that Fate marks for our reading here," she went on, dropping her hands in her lap. "The best that men had before my ancestors taught them the reading of the great signs above. You cannot ask me to make that secret plain to you in a few minutes, nor yet in a day, a year, a lifetime, unless you are born with the gift. You must trust me when I tell you that for to-day your star is as my star ; your way as my way ; your thoughts as my thoughts. We may in our wilfulness and ignorance cross the great leading of the stars, but then follow gloom, disaster, annihilation. A shattered life, or a sudden death."

If she were speaking in all sincerity, why so much the worse. He wasn't going to be convinced just yet, though.

"That's strong," he observed. "'My thoughts as your thoughts?' Suppose you begin by proving that."

"Why, it is the commonest of gipsy tricks," she said, scornfully ; "but if it is needful for your satisfaction you shall see it. You must cross my hand with silver, though. The smallest coin will do. Close your fingers on it. The left hand. So. Now I close mine on it, and speak your thoughts aloud."

He felt the fingers that closed on his thrill and quiver in sympathy with his quivering pulses. His thoughts seemed to come with a maddening, confused rush, while her eyes seemed to grow blanker as they rested on his face. Her lips parted suddenly, and her white teeth showed once in a flash of mirth for a second before she spoke again, quite gravely and respectfully.

"What *shall* you think of to drive her from your mind? Her whom it would be profanation to have named by me. And yet—and yet—if my promises were worth anything ; if Faith, which we are

told can work miracles, can remove mountains, and recall the last year's snow, could but for one brief minute bring back to you one of life's sweetest by-gone Roses ——"

He sprang from his seat in hot indignation, not unmixed with alarm. Had the witch really been reading his thoughts, or making him think her own? In either case he had carried the joke far enough. He dropped the half-crown he held as if it were red hot, and looked at her wrathfully, seeking for words in which to bid her begone from his presence for ever.

She rose too, and regarded him with a gentle, uncomprehending look. "Was I right? What did I say? I lose my hold of your mind when we part so. What is this for?" And she touched the money with her foot. "You do wrong to throw it away. There are many who would thank you for it."

"Give it to them, then, and ——"

"And go!" was what he would have said, but she had stooped obediently and picked up the coin and was rapidly crossing the path to a little group of holiday-makers who were passing slowly. A man and his wife, in decent Sunday clothing, looking pleased and important, discoursing volubly both at once to a young over-grown girl who trudged wearily along, dragging by the hand a smaller child, fat, stumbling, and with a face of invincible misery.

"Come along, dearie!" the woman was saying. "Ah, wait till she sees the Albert 'All!"

The fortune-teller stopped her. "Those children are tired out."

"Yes, miss," the woman answered civilly. "It's a pity, but you see they must go back to the country to-night, and London takes a deal of seeing, it do. Her uncle, here, have carried the little one most of the day. We've got the 'Ouses of Parliament and the Wax-works yet."

The fortune-teller stooped smiling to the child. "Tell auntie to take an omnibus everywhere," she said, pressing Edric's half-crown into the little hot fingers. "Please let me give it her," and she turned away before they had thanked her.

The outpouring of Edric's first savage wrath had been checked, as she doubtless calculated, by this little scene. He bit his lip, thankful that his first ill-considered words remained unspoken, but more and more perplexed in mind how to bring the interview to a becoming end. It seemed simple enough just to say "good afternoon" and turn on his heel, but this he felt had become an impossibility. He and this woman, whoever she might be, seemed to have got outside the safe shelter of conventional intercourse. He must either satisfy her claims or prove her an impostor, as he had some lingering hope still to do. Before he had time to fairly collect his thoughts she was back in a few swift steps, facing him boldly.

"You have had your proof. Do you want more that your way lies with mine? Are you still afraid? What do you think I can do to

you? You are young and strong, and able to defend yourself if need be. You can leave me at any moment you choose. I ask no promise in return. I drive no bargain. I trust to your honour to reward or not as you shall see fit. I only say Come!"

Her head was thrown back, her narrowed eyes were glittering, and her whole figure seemed to quiver with intensity of purpose as she waited his reply.

It came at last, dragged from his lips reluctantly as it were:

"Whether I believe in you or not, I will come."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT EDRIC FOUND IN THE CITY.

EDRIC followed his strange companion in silence across the gardens as far as the Knightsbridge Road.

"We are late!" she exclaimed suddenly. "We have lost time; we must drive."

He assented and stopped a passing hansom. "Where to?" he asked, handing her in.

She thought for a moment.

"First to St. Paul's. As fast as he can go."

"Why to St. Paul's?" was his natural enquiry when they had started, but he got no answer.

He tried in vain to frame some light desultory remarks that should break the odd embarrassment of the position. She sat in silence, leaving him to his own reflections, which every instant became graver. Under his companion's impassiveness he fancied he discovered a strange agitation. Her dusky cheeks and lips had changed colour. Her black eyes were never at rest for a second. They sought and studied his face furtively, glanced anxiously at the sun, still high above the house-tops, then at the streets they were passing through. Once her lips moved slightly, and but for the incongruity of the supposition he could have fancied she was silently praying.

The infection of her disquiet seized him at last, and his misgivings grew stronger and darker; especially when, as they approached St. Paul's, she suddenly leaned out of the cab and gave some direction that he could not catch to the driver. He asked himself over and over again what had possessed him to pay any attention to her for a minute, and laughed uneasily as he recognised the ugly resemblance of the whole proceeding to a "confidence trick" played on some country bumpkin, resulting in a paragraph in the police reports to-morrow, with some cutting remarks from the sitting magistrate on the extreme folly and credulity of the prosecutor.

Still, he had a not unwarranted confidence in his ability to take care of himself, and that and very shame kept him from stopping the cab and leaving it there and then.

He was in a region entirely strange to him. The streets he did know had looked curiously unfamiliar without the usual stream of traffic, and with closed shutters or iron bars before the shop-fronts; but now he had lost his bearings entirely. They were traversing a labyrinth of huge buildings shut up and deserted, with the same Sabbath stillness pervading them all.

They stopped at last, and his conductress dismissed the cab, with a suspiciously liberal payment, Edric fancied; and then led the way up a crooked little alley, that ran between two towering blocks of offices. It ended in a steep flight of stone steps, leading up to a frowning grey archway, with iron gates and sculptured decorations of skulls and cross-bones. Within was a sunny, empty, grey expanse of flat stones; a tall church; a row of poplars all a-twitter in a little passing breeze; a tool-shed under a plane-tree in one corner, and a tabby-cat asleep on its roof.

Edric looked at the gravestones, and speculated on the possibility of some ghastly joke being intended; but his guide passed on over them, across to the Church, and so out by another gate. Squeezed in between this gate and the backs of some more tall warehouses, was a house; a high, blank-faced, Georgian mansion, with trim muslin blinds in its windows, and boxes of flowers, and a vision of shiny oil-cloth through its open door. At the foot of its spotlessly white steps Edric's conductress signed to him to wait, and, after a moment's consideration, entered the house.

He looked curiously about him, wondering much at the oddness of the place. Its shadowy coolness and remoteness; its emptiness —himself, the cat, and the sparrows having it all to themselves, as far as he could see; its stillness, in which he could hear the plane-tree leaves rustle, and the cawing of a flight of rooks that suddenly bespeckled the patch of sky aloft. A distant murmur of voices now and then reached his ear. It seemed to come from the open windows of a building adjoining the vicarage, but within the churchyard enclosure—a new red-brick building, one-storied and quaintly roofed, trying its hardest to look two hundred years old despite its blushing newness, with latticed windows, and low-browed doorway into the churchyard. Under the eaves ran a text. "Except the Lord build the house"—Edric read before his guide rejoined him.

Taking his hand, which in his wonder he did not resent, she led him down the oil-clothed passage, past an open door, through which he caught a glimpse of a table covered with disorderly tea-cups, and a red-headed young gentleman in a cassock, standing with his back to the empty fireplace, and yawning profoundly. Then down another passage, dark, and at right angles to the first, which ended in a door ajar. She softly drew it a little wider open, and, putting her finger on her lips, motioned to him to look in.

A very pretty picture was there to behold.

The room was large and bare, and full of light from three latticed

windows. At the end opposite him was a platform, on which easels and black boards had been hustled into a corner, and replaced by tangled heaps of greenery. Ttrails of ivy, branches of lilac and hawthorn, bunches of fainting blue hyacinths, and rosy spikes of foxglove were surrounded by a little clustering congregation of girls. Girls in the window-seat, girls on chairs, girls on the floor leaning against them, girls standing holding hampers full of flowers ; some smart, some woefully shabby, all looking happily tired as with a day's pleasuring. All were silently listening to a clear and sweet voice, that made Edric's heart stop, and then sent the blood rushing through his veins with a throb of incredulous ecstasy.

His eager eyes, taking all this detail in in one flash, caught and were held by the central figure of the fair group, the one to whom all eyes were turned. A golden-haired woman, made radiant by the sunlight on her white draperies, seated on the platform edge above them all, holding out in her white hands a cluster of crimson roses.

His Rose ! His Queen ! His Queen of all Roses !

So sudden, so overwhelming was the surprise that he stepped back and passed his hand across his eyes, as if to make sure he was awake, and turned questioningly on his conductress. She was gazing at him with blank, unreadable eyes, and a patient attitude of waiting his pleasure.

"What made you bring me here?" he demanded.

She smiled a little deprecating smile, shrugged her shoulders slightly, turning the palms of her hands out with a little foreign gesture of apology. Not a trace of mockery in her smile, none of the importance of the seeress in her air ; she stood, the submissive agent of his will.

"I could but follow where your wishes led me," she said softly. "How should *I* know?"

Edric felt impatiently that he was caught somehow. But once more Mrs. Damien's voice—her voice, not her words—fell on his ear ; and eager to look, if not to listen, he turned away.

Well he might. The sun of that May day had shone on no fairer thing than Queen Rose in all her beauty, with her shabby little court around her. Pre-eminently fair, even in these days ot fair women, with a resplendent loveliness, above all question or criticism. A beauty of noble outline and rich delicate colouring, appealing alike to the dullest sense or the most refined and cultured judgment. He could have wondered and admired, Edric thought, had this been but the empty shell, the hollow mask that some fair faces seemed to be ; but with bright intelligence, radiant in those glorious eyes, and a noble, generous heart, out-speaking from those perfect lips, he could have knelt and worshipped in sheer thankfulness for this good gift of Heaven to men.

His eager gaze followed her as she seemed to be explaining her roses to the girls around. One lay on a sort of extemporised couch,

at her feet. A pretty girl, though thin and wasted, with hectic cheeks, and a poor little claw of a hand. She kept her hollow, over-bright eyes fixed on Mrs. Damien, and held up a spray of briars questioningly.

Mrs. Damien's white fingers gently bent the red petals of her roses back, and touched corolla and calyx as she spoke, but the girl's thoughts went beyond the flowers. She gazed on the lovely face above them with a yearning, passionate admiration full of love and pain, that made Edric's heart ache with uncomprehending sympathy. No one else noticed her.

When Mrs. Damien stopped speaking, all went on making up their posies and packing them carefully in two large hampers, with an accompaniment of gay, low-voiced chatter. It was like a scene in some fairy tale, Edric thought, this lovely, golden-haired lady, sitting amongst her roses, smiling down with her shining eyes on the pretty group at her feet.

Girls and flowers, both common enough in their way. Flowers from the woods and hedge-rows; work-a-day girls from the back streets, beautiful with youth and happiness only. He saw them all through the glamour of her presence, and stood motionless as dreading to break the enchantment.

Suddenly from amongst the flowers, a black, clerical figure uprose from the floor, where it had been kneeling unobserved, unpacking something, and amidst a murmur of amusement and approval, produced a large leaf, heaped with strawberries.

He was a handsome man of about thirty, with dark bright eyes, and a mobile mouth, close-shaven; a very pleasant face to look at when he spoke smilingly as he was doing then, handing his fruit about and then selecting one large berry. "This will help you to understand what Mrs. Damien has been saying," he began.

"Who is he?" Edric asked sharply, the spell broken; but no one answered. He looked round to find himself alone in the dusky passage. His guide had noiselessly disappeared, and half-relieved, half-uncertain, and wholly embarrassed, Edric blundered back as he came to the hall and open door in search of her.

No sign of the woman anywhere. The tabby cat was stretching lazily looking after something, but it might have been a sparrow. Edric descended the steps and looked about and round the church, and across the churchyard to the old Resurrection Gate, by which he had entered, but without greatly caring to catch any further glimpse of his mysterious guide. He was much more concerned to find a decent pretext for returning to his post of espial, but at the head of the vicarage steps was confronted by the same young clergyman he had beheld yawning alone with the tea-cups.

"Are you looking for anyone? Can I help you?" he asked, in a pleasant Irish voice.

"Thanks. I am—a—a friend of Mrs. Damien's, and rather want to see her."

"Come in, then, and wait. She'll be here presently."

Edric followed him into a small room, sparely furnished with pine chairs and tables of the severest ecclesiastical pattern; a tiled hearth, bare boards and cocoa matting. There was a writing-table in a corner recess with a large cross suspended on the wall above it, and a long list of notices all headed "Parish of St. Fridolin," pinned over the fire-place. That was absolutely all, except the tea-things.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you a cup," the curate said, glancing at the débris. "We drained the pot half-an-hour ago. The girls came in hungry as tanners after their day in the woods, in spite of their picnic dinner. They've had a grand time entirely! Boating and driving and gathering flowers."

"Have you been with them?" Edric asked rather jealously.

"I? Not I? Mrs. Damien doesn't want me, or any masculine assistance."

"But there is a gentleman there."

"Oh, the Vicar, you mean? Yes, and I must get him out before long. He invited them all here to tea before Evensong. These are the odds and ends of Mrs. Damien's acquaintances in the parish. Friendless girls who had nowhere in particular to go for a holiday." Then, with bated breath: "She's going to take some others to the theatre to-night! It's horribly demoralising—but what will you? She is queen here, and we can but obey."

He shrugged his shoulders gently, and led the way back to Edric's former post of espial, where, with a quizzical expression on his ugly, clever little face, he awaited the conclusion of the Vicar's remarks, to not one word of which did Edric give ear. Which was a pity, as he might have learned a good deal about the genesis of a strawberry, and the development of hips and haws.

He followed the curate up the room awkwardly enough. Would she remember him? Would she frown at his intrusion? How could he explain his being there at all? One moment more and all his misgivings were swept away like evil mists by the glory of her gracious smile. She held out her slender white hand. He would have knelt and kissed it had he had his will; but shackled by nineteenth century conventionality, he only blundered out an incoherent greeting, and stopped short in the middle of a tangled sentence.

"I am very glad to see you here," she said, in her sweet, stately fashion, with her clear, un-English voice. It was as far removed from what we call Yankee—as far as the South from the North. "Do you know Mr. Stannard?——Mr. Poynter—Mr. Stannard."

The dark, handsome Vicar bowed gravely, and spoke a few courteous words, regarding him, Edric felt sure, with some disfavour. The Curate nodded friendlily.

"Ye'll be staying for Evensong? Do, and I'll make it worth your while. I mean, apart from the benefit of the service, of course. It's not every day you'll see a church like St. Fridolin's."

Then the two clergymen bade adieu.

"We are going to send some of our spoils to the hospitals," Mrs. Damien explained. "I think the hampers must be full by this time. Elsie, what is it? You have rested too long on those uncomfortable chairs. Come to the window."

The pale, pretty invalid had risen to her feet, and was standing unsteadily, clutching the back of a chair. Mrs. Damien held out her arm, and the girl caught at it, wavered, and would have slipped to the floor if Edric had not caught her in time. She rested a mere feather-weight on his arm; her brown, curly head dropped backwards on his shoulder, the delicate little face grew a ghastly white. The girls crowded round in a small ferment of sympathy and suggestion, but Mrs. Damien kept them off.

"Aunt Mamie. Where is Aunt Mamie?"

As if the name had been a conjuration, there rose from a corner what Edric had taken to be a bundle of wraps flung out of the way, but which suddenly upreared itself in the form of a mighty, broad-shouldered woman, a Negress, who came promptly forward with a gleaming smile.

"Comin', Miss Rosie."

She scattered the girls to right and left as she advanced, towering in the might of her superb physique, a head and shoulders above the puny white-skinned children of Japhet around her. She wore a dark gown, with a crimson kerchief, a sort of gipsy bonnet trimmed with white muslin, and great swinging hoops of gold in her ears. She was a full-blooded African, only one generation from Nubia, and of the finer type of negro physiognomy, with a face that looked as if it might have been full of mournful majesty before it learned to be comic. Now it was all grinning good-humour.

"What *you* been doin', honey?" she addressed the girl, whose great dark eyelashes quivered slowly open till her up-turned brown eyes met Edric's in a vacant gaze. "Now, ef de gen'leman 'll allow me, s'pose you come 'long wi' me." And, stooping over her, she lifted her in her muscular arms like a baby, and carried her off to the deep window-seat, Mrs. Damien and Edric following with chairs and cushions.

Edric kept discreetly in the background during their further ministrations. A long trail of briar roses lay at his feet. He remembered that the girl had been holding it during the Vicar's lecture, and picked it up. It pricked his fingers sharply once or twice as he stood playing with it absently, waiting for the chance of another word from Mrs. Damien. The cluster of girls round the window dispersed presently, and he could see Elsie, revived by the fresher air, smiling a dim little smile of thanks up at Aunt Mamie, who stood arms a-kimbo beaming down benignantly on her.

"You do now very well; out of de way up dere, honey. Now gals, s'pose we cl'ar 'way dis yere truck and wash up de teafings.

You, Lotty, go fin' Mis' Goodliffe, and present de compliments of de company, and get de loan of a broom. An' Mis' Rosie," in a confidential aside, "s'pose you jus' take lilly walk and talk to de gen'leman outside der, out o' my road, eh?"

Mrs. Damien laughed, and prepared to carry out the suggestion quite as a matter of course.

"I'll come back in time for you, Elsie. Can you rest quite easily now?"

"Here are your flowers," said Edric, awkwardly enough, moved to address the girl by some odd, shy look, half-appeal, half-question in her eyes; "they are too pretty to lose."

"Miss Elsie Paramount—Mr. Poynter," said Mrs. Damien, after a moment's hesitation, performing the introduction with somewhat marked formality.

Edric bowed, and Miss Elsie Paramount flushed up to the roots of her pretty curly hair as she took the roses.

"They are only poor, common things," she said in her tremulous, musical voice. "It was a pity to gather them. They were lovely in their own hedge-row, but now ——"

The roses fell as she spoke, covering her white gown with a pink shower of petals. She held up the bare branch pitifully for a moment, and then turned her head sharply away.

CHAPTER IV.

TEN GOLDEN MINUTES.

Mrs. Damien passed on and out through the low-browed doorway into the still grey churchyard, where the sinking sun was casting long shadows of the poplars athwart the graves. Edric followed, the sense of enchantment still strong upon him.

They sauntered slowly across to the rustling plane-tree, under which was a huge raised slab, sacred to the memory of some long-forgotten parishioner, looking like a dining-table for ghouls. Mrs. Damien seated herself in the shade and lifted her clear grey eyes on Edric with a look of amused enquiry, that suddenly stirred his guilty soul with the dread of the explanation he was bound to offer of his appearance there.

"So you know the way to St. Fridolin's," she began with a smile. "How did you find us out?"

"I came with a—a—friend," Edric was beginning, horribly puzzled, but got no farther, for over their heads in its grimy grey tower St. Fridolin's bell suddenly burst into deafening clamour.

Mrs. Damien tried to speak, laughed, put her hands to her ears, and pointed to the open church door.

"Tell them to stop at once," she commanded.

"Stop the church bell?" he asked wonderingly, but only received an imperative little nod in reply.

Not sorry for the interruption he sped on his mission, rather doubtful of the result, and found inside the great gaunt whitewashed porch a little dusty old man in a niche with his foot in a stirrup, hard at work.

"Have you any objection to stopping for a few minutes—to oblige a lady—Mrs Damien." Edric was in some doubt how to make his request.

"Sure—ly, if Madam wishes it," was the unexpected response; and wiping his forehead he perched himself on a tall three-legged stool in the corner.

"It's very ridiculous having a bell at all," Mrs. Damien said calmly, when Edric returned. "It cannot possibly reach the ears of any of the congregation, ourselves excepted, and I want to hear you talk. Tell me how you happen to be here?"

"Won't you tell me first how I happen to find you here, after searching South Kensington for you in vain," was the evasive rejoinder. "You gave me your card, you remember."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she said, smiling up at him. "If I had only known where to write to you I would have sent you my new address. Or I think I should—I am not certain. I couldn't be sure whether you ever really intended to come and see me. Let me tell you how it happened," she continued, setting aside negligently his outburst of vehement protest. "The simplest thing in the world. My whimsical friend, Miss Cadogan, whom I met abroad, begged me to take her town house off her hands when I came to settle in London. I was delighted to do so; I had tried joint housekeeping with my cousin, Lady Monchalsea, and found it not a success." Edric nodded and laughed in comprehension. "I established myself in St. Maur Road in March, and received notice to quit in May, as Miss Cadogan had suddenly resolved on coming up to town for the season. So I had to seek shelter elsewhere, close by, not a hundred yards away. How easy it is to be lost in London! Why, we might never have met again but for the chance that brought us together here!"

He shuddered slightly and hurried away from the subject.

"You haven't told me what brought *you* here yet, Mrs. Damien, nor what St. Fridolin is to you, or you to St. Fridolin, that you come to have more authority over the church bell than the Vicar; nor who are all these devoted followers of yours."

"Friends of mine, that is all. Better friends to me than if I had ever done any real good to one of them. I came here in search of amusement, occupation, just to see if I could not make my life of some worth in my generation. I thought that Mr. Stannard needed help, even the little I could give." Her voice dropped tremulously with a suggestion of disappointment. "You know Mr. Stannard of course—*the* Mr. Stannard of St. Ermyntrude's?"

"Never heard of him," answered Edric in an unenthusiastic, not to say disparaging, tone. She flashed a look of pitying astonishment on him.

"You can't be much in the way of church-going, then," was her comment. "Why, when I came over here he was the most celebrated man in town. In the church, I mean," qualifying that somewhat sweeping assertion. "And he gave up everything, popularity, friends, the chance of advancement, *all* to come here. To the horridest, stupidest, everyday sort of drudgery; wasting his talents on the odds and ends of a congregation which he can manage to collect."

"I suppose he had his reasons," Edric observed sulkily, as she stopped short. Was *this* his fortunate chance? he demanded angrily as he prodded viciously in the earth between two flagstones at his feet. To come here just to listen to the catalogue of Mr. Stannard's merits—and worse! For he had noticed the sudden delicate flush that rose to his companion's cheek, the dilation of her lovely eyes that seemed to deepen and soften as the sentence died unfinished on her lips; and turning quickly round, following the direction of her look, fancied he caught sight of a dark figure disappearing round the church in the direction of the vestry door. He impatiently rammed a stray straw down the hole, digging it in and burying it deep as if it were the Vicar, while he waited her next words.

"So as I said," she went on, with heightened colour and lips compressed as if with annoyance, turning her head sharply from the church as she spoke. "I came here to seek for work, and somehow I find that the best thing I can do for my fellow-creatures is to play. Humiliating, is it not? Did you ever hear of a woman's mission consisting of looking her prettiest, dressing her finest, and talking as amusingly as she knows how? That's all I am good for, I find." She spoke in a little tone of exasperation, that was evidently the outcome of some past vexation. "You heard the Vicar's little moral about garden roses and their place in creation. I believe he was doing his best to justify my existence—" She stopped, as if afraid to trust her words.

"I didn't hear him, and I shouldn't have listened if I had thought he meant anything so uncivil. A rose wants no justification—to any that have eyes to see."

Queen Rose smiled on her champion. "But you haven't told me how you came here yet."

"Well, you see I—I came up to call on the Archdales, you know," Edric went on, rather desperately. "Sir John is our old colonel, and he asked me to call, and—it seems too absurd, but it's true—I'd gone and lost his address; and so I ——"

Another moment and Edric might have hazarded the wild statement that he had come to look for Sir John in the City, and so brought himself into everlasting confusion and disgrace, when the cherub aloft that keeps watch o'er the luck of impostors, intervened on his behalf.

"The Archdales? Why, they are friends of mine. Very great friends indeed." She laid her pretty finger-tip meditatively on her lip and looked at him consideringly. "Don't interrupt me. I'm thinking."

Edric willingly obeyed, and a solemn silence ensued.

"Can you play the clarinet?" was the startling query that broke it.

"The clarinet? No. I wish I did. I believe I know one when I see it, but that's all."

"The piano, violin, *any* instrument? No! Perhaps you sing? Recite? No!" half-impatiently at Edric's dolorous repeated negatives.

"I can't do anything," he dejectedly avowed, feeling ready to dash his head against the nearest tombstone with rage at his own incapacity, and envy of that young donkey, Doudney, the comic man of the regiment, on whose topical songs and banjo he had been wont to look with high disdain. Doudney would have undertaken to get up anything she wanted, from the three-card trick to ground-and-lofty tumbling, at a day's notice. "I don't know that I'm good for anything—except dancing."

"Then you're the very person I want," was the prompt and unexpected rejoinder. "I was just thinking whether it was safe to ask you to dine with me on Monday next, the 5th, to meet the Archdales. Don't laugh. It was a very serious question. I have a musical party in the evening, and have as many performers on my hands as I can manage. One more would be fatal. Unless by some happy chance you *had* played the clarinet." She sighed resignedly. "Now you must go and set old Totterdale ringing again. It must be nearly service time. You shall have your invitation in due form, if you care to come up from Shorncliffe for so little."

Edric sped churchwards, treading on air. To see her again! To be welcomed to her home! To have caught as it were this golden ten minutes by the wings and held it in his hand, even though he must let it go again. He found the old bell-ringer perched on his stool, and set him a-going with such good-will that it seemed to threaten to bring all the four little pine-apples, that adorned the heads of the pilasters at the corners of the tower, rattling down about his ears.

"Now we must come back to Aunt Mamie," said Mrs. Damien, who had risen and was slowly sauntering towards the red-brick building, which Edric now discovered, from an inscription over the doorway, was the parish-room, "Builded" that year by "Eustace Stannard, Priest of the Parish of St. Fridolin the Hermit." "You mustn't begin by neglecting her. She is a very important person in my household. If she likes you, she'll call you 'Mars' Poynter,' and brew you coffee or mint julep when you come to see me. If she doesn't, she'll speak of you as 'he' or 'de soger genleman,' and scold me every time I behave civilly to you."

(" Every time you come to see me. Every time I behave civilly to you." The glorious possibilities set Edric's heart dancing and almost took away his powers of reply.)

" I remember your speaking of her." (What word of hers had he not remembered ?) " Your old nurse."

" Yes, and my mother's. She came with her from Charlestown when she married my father. When I die, she'll go back to another branch of the Endicotts of South Carolina—whose mother she nursed—or says so. I don't know how old she is, and she doesn't. I only know that she can do the work of three other women put together, if she may do it her own way, take her own time, and never be contradicted ; and would die for me as readily as tie my shoes."

Edric looked as if he did not consider that last trait at all extraordinary, and they drifted on into pleasant reminiscences of their first meeting and their journey together ; while through the windows could be seen Aunt Mamie and the girls, working like elves, clearing away all traces of their presence. Elsie still rested in her window-seat. Her eyes were fixed on a clear blue patch of sky above the Church Tower ; her lips moved silently now and then ; she seemed rapt in some ecstatic vision as she lay pressing, all unconsciously, the bare thorny rose-stem to her breast.

At the sound of Mrs. Damien's voice she started, her cheeks flushed, and Edric fancied he saw a sudden look of repulsion cross her face. She rose directly and came to meet them as they entered, slowly and painfully, but with a pretty smile.

" Is it too much for you, dear ? " Mrs. Damien asked.

" What, Church ? Oh, never," was the surprised response. " It is the very crown of this day's happiness. My great joy and rest."

" You good little thing ! " Mrs. Damien cried. " Come, let me help you." Elsie seemed to shrink away from the offered aid, and turning, clasped her hands round Aunt Mamie's stalwart arm, and so passing on, left the two together once more, for which Edric blessed her in his heart.

" Do you educate all your followers up to that frame of mind ? " he enquired, not jestingly but in curiosity.

" I don't attempt it," was the short reply. " Birdie—as she is sometimes called—is a rare nature, a sweet devotional soul. She is self-educated, and a born lady. Her father is our Churchwarden and an aggrieved parishioner."

They had nearly reached the Church again. She stopped short and held her hand out.

" I think I will say good-bye to you now. After service I have not a spare moment. I forget, though—*how* did you say you happened to find your way here ? "

" Oh, it's a long story," said Edric, with brazen self-possession. " I couldn't begin it now."

He took her soft white fingers once more in his and held them as

long as he dared. It was the last drop of his cup of delight and must serve his thirsty soul for days.

"Good-bye, till Monday, the fifth!" was the only eloquence Love lent to Speech in his case, and with a last smile she vanished within the dusky porch.

He had had some vague hope of sitting by her, of hearing her voice, of watching unreproached her beautiful face in repose, but a stern verger made short work of his expectations and disposed of him on the opposite side of the aisle.

The church was full of broken lights and shadows. Huge galleries impended aloft, and a three-storied erection in black oak loomed at the east end. No one, however, used either gallery or pulpit. The service was brisk, the music excellent. Edric imagined he detected some novelties in Mr. de Cressy's performance, but being of an easy-going and uncritical turn, was no whit disturbed by them.

An intervening row of worshippers screened Mrs. Damien from his view. Aunt Mamie, book in hand, joined in the singing right heartily, and rolled out fervent "Amens" and responses with a will; and beside her, at about the level of her elbow, he could just catch sight of Elsie's little bent head, turned once in his direction, and as swiftly away again, when she caught his eyes.

The service over, he hurried out as quickly as he decently could, with a hope of intercepting Mrs. Damien, but by the time he reached the door through which she had departed, she had disappeared he knew not where. His golden moments had flown beyond all hope of recapture. He lingered undecidedly beneath the porch; not the great west one where the bell rang, but the south, older and smaller, with a curious beast, that may or may not have been St. Fridolin's Bear, seated in a niche above. There he was joined in a short time by de Cressy, hurried and apologetic, pursued by a parishioner, and with no time to spare for the promised exploration of the curiosities of St. Fridolin's.

"You'll be coming again soon, I hope," said the sociable little curate. "It's worth your while," and his eyes twinkled comically as he bade adieu.

Edric readily promised, little dreaming how the current of his life was henceforward to set towards that grim old tower—that valley of gravestones, amidst the red-brick heights on whose topmost chimneys alone the sinking sun now shone.

He turned again into the church, where the gloom seemed to have deepened ten-fold, and his steps sounded hollow in the echoing roof above. He was smiling to himself; de Cressy's parting words still rang pleasantly in his ears. Yes, he should come again—and with her. He stopped, and the smile faded from his lips, the flow of gay anticipations arrested, frozen. The two faintly-burning candles still glimmered in their sockets on either side the lectern, and within the dim circle of their radiance, seated low on the cushions surrounding the communion table, her elbows resting on her knees and her chin sup-

ported on her hands, sat a woman, her white face upturned to his and her black unwinking eyes gleaming out of the gloom.

"You here!" he cried, roughly. "Here," answered the echo from the darkness above. The woman only nodded, her eyes still holding his and keeping the grim, expressive silence that he found more unendurable than any speech.

"Well," he went on, with an effort. "I suppose you have come to ask for the reward you said you would leave to my honour. I don't deny you have done me a service—a great service—and I am quite prepared to give you anything you like to ask in reason."

She rose with one swift light movement and advanced, her hand outstretched. "You have paid me," she spoke, in the low distinct whisper that her voice sank into at times. "You are honest and true. I did well to trust you. I have no more to ask. You have faith in me, that is sufficient."

Edric was young, but not altogether so inexperienced in the dark ways of the world as to suppose that such a declaration was to be taken in the literal sense of the words, and he waited for what was to follow uneasily. But the woman kept silence.

"I see, you don't want money," he said at length. "Very good. If there is any other way in which I can help you—"

"You can. But the offer must be a free one for me to accept it," she replied, promptly. "You can do for me as much and no more than I have done for you."

"I don't quite see how I am to manage that," he interposed, doubtfully.

"When the time comes I will show you, unless *you* by that time have repented your promise.

"That is not likely to be the case," he spoke rather indignantly.

"Will you give me a pledge that I may show it you? Anything. Your glove, the smallest trifle you have worn or possessed. Give me that," and she pointed to his watch-chain, from which there hung a tiger's claw mounted in gold.

Edric slowly unfastened it. "Is it of value?" she asked.

"Not much. My father shot the brute, so I should be sorry to lose it, that's all."

"You shall see it again," she replied, smiling a little grimly.

"I daresay. But you must make your meaning a little clearer before I give it you."

"You do well to be cautious," she answered, with a touch of impatient scorn, "but I cannot satisfy you. Not till the day comes shall I know what need of you it may bring me. I shall not ask for gold, believe me. Not for gold nor yet for love"—this with a scoff—"nor for a word or deed that might disgrace an officer and a gentleman. Even then you may fail me."

Edric silently laid the tiger's claw on his open palm and extended

it towards her. In silence she laid her small dusky palm on his, and thus, hand to hand, with the tiger's claw between, they stood for one portentous moment.

"I take this then as your pledge. When or where you next meet with it, be it far or near, be the hour what it may, let who will be the bearer, you will know it for the token that the hour of my need has come, and hold yourself bound in honour to redeem it."

He bowed, more impressed than he cared to admit to himself.

"How am I to find you?"

"Follow the messenger, whoever it may be."

"And tell me—how shall I know you? By what name shall I remember you?"

The candles had burned low in their glasses, so low that a passing breeze—or was it a waft of a dark mantle—extinguished both at once.

"You may call me—Euphrosyne."

"Euphrosyne" echoed the dark vault above. And with the word ringing in his ears, Edric turned about in the dusky twilight to find himself alone.

(To be continued.)

GOOD-MORROW!

At the hour of waiting,
Ere the stir of morn,
To sad hearts, debating,
Lo! a child is born!
And to eyes persistent,
That would pierce the night,
Feeble, flick'ring, distant,
Shows the dawn of light.

Of our love uncertain,
Thus the child draws near.
Who shall lift the curtain
Of the coming year?
What can comfort grieving
O'er a vacant place?—
Yet on our bereaving
Smiles his stranger face!

Then the hearts that knew him
Not until that hour,
Sudden cleave unto him
With a new-felt power.
Hope he brings for sighing,
Joy, with day re-born;
And the East replying,
Flushes with the morn.

Brave his eyes meet ours,
Warm his clasping hands,
While frail, wintry flowers
Blossom where he stands.
Vain regret and sorrow
Straightway disappear,
As we cry, "Good-morrow!"
To the glad New Year!

G. B. Stuart.

A TRAGEDY.

CRABB COT, Squire Todhetley's estate in Worcestershire, lay close to North Crabb, and from two to three miles off Islip, both of which places you have heard of already. Half way on the road to Islip from Crabb, a side road, called Brook Lane, branched straight off on the left towards unknown wilds, for the parts there were not at all frequented. Passing a solitary homestead here and there, Brook Lane would bring you at the end of less than two miles to a small hamlet, styled Duck Brook.

I am not responsible for the name. I don't know who is. It was called Duck Brook long before my time, and will be, no doubt, long after I have left time behind me. The village rustics call it Duck Bruck.

Duck Brook proper contains some twenty or thirty houses, mostly humble dwellings, built in the form of a triangle, and two or three shops. A set of old stocks for the correction of the dead-and-gone evil-doers might be seen still, and a square pound in which to imprison stray cattle. And I would remark, as it may be of use further on, that the distance from Duck Brook to either Islip or Crabb was about equal—some three miles, or so; it stood at right angles between them. Passing down Brook Lane (which was in fact a fairly wide turnpike road) into the high road, turning to the right would bring you to Crabb; turning to the left, to Islip.

Just before coming to that populous part of Duck Brook, the dwelling places, there stood in a garden facing the road a low, wide, worn house, its bricks dark with age, and now partly covered with ivy, which had once been the abode of a flourishing farmer. The land on which this lay belonged to a Captain Falkner—some hundred acres of it. The Captain was in difficulties and, afraid to venture into England, resided abroad.

A Mr. Preen lived in the house now—Gervais Preen, a gentleman by descent. The Preens were Worcestershire people; and old Mr. Preen, dead now, had left a large family of sons and daughters, who had for the most part nothing to live upon. How or where Gervais Preen had lately lived, no one knew much about; some people said it was in London, some thought it was in Paris; but he suddenly came back to Worcestershire and took up his abode, much to the general surprise, at this old farm-house at Duck Brook. It was soon known that he lived in it rent-free, having undertaken the post of agent to Captain Falkner.

"Agent to Captain Falkner—what a mean thing for a Preen to do!" cried Islip and Crabb all in a breath.

"Not at all mean; gentlemen must live as well as other people," warmly disputed the Squire. "I honour Preen for it." And he was the first to walk over to Duck Brook and shake hands with him.

Others followed the Squire's example, but Mr. Preen did not seem inclined to be sociable. He was forty-five years old then; a little shrimp of a man with a dark face, small eyes like round black beads, and a very cross look. He met his visitors civilly, for he was a gentleman, but he let it be known that he and his wife did not intend to visit or be visited. The Squire pressed him to bring Mrs. Preen to a friendly dinner at Crabb Cot; but he refused emphatically, frankly saying that as they could not afford to entertain in return, they should not themselves go out to entertainments.

Thus Gervais Preen and his wife began their career at Duck Brook, keeping themselves to themselves, locked up in lavender, so to say, as if they did not want the world outside to remember their existence. Perhaps that was the ruling motive, for he owed a few debts of long standing. One or two creditors had found him out, and were driving, it was said, a hard bargain with him, insisting upon payment by degrees if it could not be handed over in a lump.

But there was one member of the family who declined to keep herself laid up in lavender, and that was the only daughter, Jane. She came to Crabb Cot of her own accord, and made friends with us; made friends with Mrs. Jacob Chandler and her girls, and with Emma Paul at Islip. She was a fair, lively, open-natured girl, and welcomed everywhere.

Mr. and Mrs. Preen and Jane were seated at the breakfast-table one fine morning in the earliest days of spring. A space of about two years had gone on since they first came to Duck Brook. Breakfast was laid, as usual, in a small flagged room opening from the kitchen. A piece of cold boiled bacon, three eggs, a home-made loaf and a pat of butter were on the table, nothing more luxurious. Mrs. Preen, a thin woman, under the middle height, poured out the coffee. She must once have been very pretty. Her face was fair and smooth still, with a bright rose tint on the cheeks, and a peevish look in her mild blue eyes. Jane's face was very much like her mother's, but her blue eyes had no peevishness in them as yet. Poor Mrs. Preen's life was one of rubs and crosses, had been for a long while, and that generally leaves its marks upon the countenance. When Mr. Preen came in he had a letter in his hand, which he laid beside his plate, address downwards. He looked remarkably cross, and did not speak. No one else spoke. Conversation was seldom indulged in at meal times, unless the master chose to begin it. But in passing something to him, Jane's eyes chanced to fall on the letter, and saw that it was of thin, foreign paper.

"Papa, is that from Oliver?"

"Don't you see it is?" returned Mr. Preen.

"And—is anything different decided?" asked Mrs. Preen, timidly, as if she were afraid of either the question or the answer.

"What is there different to decide?" he retorted.

"But, Gervais, I thought you wrote to say that he could not come home."

"And he writes back to say that he must come. I suppose he must. The house over there is being given up; he can't take up his abode in the street. There's what he says," continued Mr. Preen, tossing the letter to the middle of the table for the public benefit. "He will be here to-morrow."

A glad light flashed into Jane's countenance. She lifted her handkerchief to hide it.

Oliver Preen was her brother; she and he were the only children. He had been partly adopted by a great aunt, once Miss Emily Preen, the sister of his grandfather. She had married Major Magnus late in life, and was left a widow. Since Oliver left school, three years ago now, he had lived with Mrs. Magnus at Tours, in France, where she had settled down. She was supposed to be well off; and the Preen family—Gervais Preen and all his hungry brothers and sisters—had cherished expectations from her. They thought she might provide slenderly for Oliver, and divide the rest of her riches amidst them. But a week or two ago she had died after a short illness, and then the amazing fact came out that she had nothing to leave. All Mrs. Magnus once possessed had been sunk in an annuity on her own life.

This was bad enough for the brothers and the sisters, but it was nothing compared with the shock it gave him of Duck Brook. For you see he had to take his son back now and provide for him; and Oliver had been brought up to do nothing. A mild young man, he, we understood, not at all clever enough to set the Thames on fire.

Mr. Preen finished his breakfast and left the room, carrying the letter with him. Jane went at once into the garden, which in places was no better than a wilderness, and ran and raced about the sheltered paths that were out of sight of the windows, and leaped beds, and jumped up to catch the lower branches of trees, all in very glee. She and Oliver were intensely attached to one another; she had not seen him for three years, and now they were going to meet again. To-morrow! oh, to-morrow! To-morrow, and he would be here! She should see him face to face!

"Jane!" called out a stern voice, "I want you."

In half a moment Jane had appeared in the narrow front path that led between beds of sweet but common flowers from the entrance gate in the centre of the palings to the door of the house, and was walking up demurely. Mr. Preen was standing at an open window.

"Yes, papa," she said. And Mr. Preen only answered by looking at her and shutting down the window.

The door opened into a passage, which led straight through to the back of the house. On the left, as you entered, was the parlour; on the right was the room which Mr. Preen used as an office, in which were kept the account books and papers relating to the estate. It was a square room, lighted by two tall narrow windows. A piece of matting covered the middle of the floor, and on it stood Mr. Preen's large flat writing table, inlaid with green leather. Shelves and pigeon-holes filled one side of the walls, and a few chairs stood about. Altogether the room had a cold, bare look.

It was called the "Buttery." When Mr. and Mrs. Preen first came to the house, the old man who had had charge showed them over it. "This is the parlour," he said, indicating the room they were then looking at; "and this," he added, opening the door on the opposite side of the passage, "is the Buttery." Jane laughed: but they had adopted the name.

"I want these letters copied, Jane," said Mr. Preen, who was now sitting at his table, the fire at his back, and the windows in front of him; and he handed to her two letters which he had just written.

Jane took her seat at the table opposite to him. Whenever Mr. Preen wanted letters copied, he called upon her to do it. Jane did not much like the task; she was not fond of writing, and she was afraid of making mistakes.

When she had finished the letters this morning she escaped to her mother, asking how she could help in the preparations for Oliver. They kept one maid-servant; a capless young lady of sixteen, who wore a frock and pinafore of a morning. There was Sam as well; a well-grown civil youth, whose work lay chiefly out of doors.

The day passed. The next day was passing. From an early hour Jane Preen had watched for the guest's arrival. In the afternoon, when she was weary of looking and looking in vain, she put on a warm shawl and her pink sun-bonnet and went out of doors with a book.

A little lower down, towards the Islip Road, Brook Lane was flanked on one side by a grove of trees, too dense and thick to admit of penetration. But there were two straight paths in them at some distance from each other, which would carry you to the back, and to the stream running parallel with the highway in front; from which stream Duck Brook derived its name. These openings in the trees were called Inlets. A few worn benches stood in front of the trees, and also behind, and had been there for ages. If you took your seat upon one of those in front, you could watch the passing and re-passing (if there chanced to be any) on the high road; if you preferred a seat at the back, you might contemplate the pellucid stream and the meads beyond it, like a knight or damsel of romance.

This was a favourite resort of Jane Preen's, a species of relief from the dullness at home. She generally sat by the stream, but to-day she faced the road, for she was looking for Oliver. It was not a frequented road at all, but I think this has been said; sometimes an hour

would pass away and not so much as a farmer's horse and cart jolt by, or a beggar shambling on foot.

Jane had brought out a favourite book of the day, one of Bulwer Lytton's, which had been lent to her by Miss Julietta Chandler. If we had only such writers now! Shall we ever have their like again? Compare a work over which a tremendous fuss is made in the present day with one of those romances or novels of the past when some of us were young—works written by Scott and Bulwer, and others I need not mention. Why, they were as solid gold compared with silver and tinsel.

Jane tried to lose herself in the romantic love of Lucy and Paul, or in the passionate love-letters of Sir William Brandon, written when he was young; and she could not do so. Her eyes kept turning, first to that way of the road, then to this: she did not know which way Oliver would come. By rail to Crabb station she supposed, and then by a fly onwards; though being strange to the neighbourhood he might pitch upon any out-of-the-way route and delay his arrival.

Suddenly her heart stopped beating and then coursed on to fever heat. A fly was winding along towards her in the distance, from the direction of Crabb. Jane rose and waited at the edge of the path. It was not Oliver. Three ladies and a child sat in the fly. They all stared at her, evidently wondering who she was and what she did there. She went back to the bench, but did not open her book again.

It must be getting near four o'clock. She could tell it by the sun, for she had no watch. She thought she would go in. Slowly taking up the book, she was turning towards home, which was close by, when upon giving a lingering farewell look down the road, a solitary foot passenger came into view: a gentlemanly young man, who had an umbrella in his hand and a coat on his arm.

Was it Oliver? She was not quite sure at first. He was of middle height, slight and slender: had a mild fair face and blue eyes with a great sadness in them. Jane noticed the sadness at once, and thought she remembered it; she thought the face also like her own and her mother's.

"Oliver?"

"Jane! Why—is it you? I did not expect to find you under that peasant bonnet, Jane."

They clung to each other, kissing fondly, tears in the eyes of both.

"But why are you walking, Oliver? Did you come to Crabb?"

"Yes," he said. "I thought I might as well walk; I did not think it was quite so far. The porter will send on my things."

There was just a year between them; Oliver would be twenty-one in a month, Jane was twenty-two, but did not look as much. She took his arm as they walked home.

As she halted at the little gate, Oliver paused in a sort of surprise and gazed about: at the plain wooden palings painted green, which shut in the crowded, homely garden; at the old farmhouse.

"Is *this* the place, Jane?"

"Yes. You have not been picturing it as a palace, have you?"

Oliver laughed, and held back the low gate for her. But as he passed in after her, a perceptible shiver shook his frame. It was gone in a moment; but in that moment it had shaken him from head to foot. Jane saw it.

"Surely you have not caught a chill, Oliver?"

"Not at all; I am warm with my walk. I don't know why I should have shivered," he added. "It was like the feeling you have when people say somebody's 'walking over your grave.'"

Mr. Preen received his son coldly, but not unkindly; Mrs. Preen did the same; she was led by her husband's example in all things. Tea, though it was so early, was prepared at once, with a substantial dish for the traveller; and they sat down to it in the parlour.

It was a long room with a beam running across the low ceiling. A homely room, with a coarse red-and-green carpet and horse-hair chairs. A few ornaments of their own (for the furniture belonged to the house), relics of better days, were disposed about; and Jane had put on the table a glass of early primroses. The two windows, tall and narrow, answered to those in the Buttery. Oliver surveyed the room in silent dismay: it wore so great a contrast to the fashionable salons at Tours to which he was accustomed. He gave them the details of his aunt's death and of her affairs.

When tea was over, Mr. Preen shut himself into the Buttery; Mrs. Preen retired to the kitchen to look after Nancy, who had to be watched, like most young servants, as you watch a sprightly calf. Jane and Oliver went out again, Jane taking the way to the Inlets. This time she sat down facing the brook. The dark trees were behind them, the clear stream flowed past in a gentle murmur; nothing but fields beyond. It was a solitary spot.

"What do you call this place—the Inlets?" cried Oliver. "Why is it called that?"

"I'm sure I don't know: because of those two openings from the road, I suppose. I like sitting here; it is so quiet. Oliver, how came Aunt Emily to sink all her money in an annuity?"

"To benefit herself, of course; it nearly doubled her income. She did it years ago."

"And you did not know that she had nothing to leave?"

"No one knew. She kept the secret well."

"It is very unfortunate for *you*."

"Yes—compared with what I had expected," sighed Oliver. "It can't be helped, Jane, and I try not to feel disappointed. Aunt Emily in life was very kind to me; apart from all selfish consideration I regret and mourn her."

"You will hardly endure this dreary place after your gay and happy life at Tours, Oliver. Duck Brook is the fag-end of the world."

"It does not appear to be very lively," remarked Oliver, with a sort of dry sarcasm. "How was it that the Pater came to it?"

"Well, you know—it was a living, and we had nothing else."

"I don't understand."

"When Uncle Gilbert died, there was no other of our uncles, those who were left, who could help papa; at least they said so; and I assure you we fell into great embarrassment as the weeks went on. It was impossible to stay in Jersey; we could pay no one; and what would have been the ending but for papa's falling in with Captain Falkner, I can't imagine. Captain Falkner owns a good deal of land about here; but he is in difficulties himself and cannot be here to look after it; so he offered papa the agency and a house to live in. I can tell you, Oliver, it was like a godsend to us."

"Do you mean to say that my father is an agent?" cried the young man, his face dyed with a red flush.

Jane nodded. "That, and nothing less. He looks after the estate and is paid a hundred pounds a-year salary, and we live rent free. Lately he has taken something else, something different; the agency of some new patent agricultural implements."

Oliver Preen looked very blank. He had been living the life of a gentleman, was imbued with a gentleman's notions, and this news brought him the most intense mortification.

"He will expect you to help him in the Buttery," continued Jane.

"In the what?"

"The Buttery," laughed Jane. "It is the room where papa keeps his accounts and writes his letters. Letters come in nearly every morning now, enquiring about the new agricultural implements; papa has to answer them, and wants some of his answers copied."

"And he has only a hundred a year!" murmured Oliver, unable to get over that one item of information. "Aunt Emily had from eight to nine hundred, and lived up to her income."

"The worst is that we cannot spend all the hundred. Papa has back debts upon him. Have you brought home any money, Oliver?"

"None to speak of," he answered; "there was none to bring. Aunt Emily's next quarter's instalment would have been due this week; but she died first, you see. She lived in a furnished house; and as to the few things she had of her own, and her personal trinkets, Aunt Margaret Preen came down and swooped upon them. Jane, how have you managed to put up with the lively state of affairs here?"

"And this lively spot—the fag-end of the world. It was Emma Paul first called it so to me. I put up with it because I can't help myself, Oliver."

"Who is Emma Paul?"

"She's the daughter of Lawyer Paul, of Islip."

"Oh," said Oliver, slightingly.

"And the nicest girl in the world," added Jane.

"But I can tell you this much, Oliver," she continued, after a pause "when we came first to Duck Brook it seemed to me like a haven of refuge. Our life in Jersey had become intolerable, our life here was peaceful—no angry creditors, no daily applications for debts that we could not pay. Here we were free and happy, and it gave me a liking for the place. It is dull, of course; but I go pretty often to see Emma Paul, or to take tea at Mrs. Jacob Chandler's, and at Crabb Cot when the Todhetleys are staying there. Sam brings the gig for me in the evening, when I don't walk home. You will have to bring it for me now."

"Oh there's a gig, is there?"

"Papa has to keep that for his own use in going about the land: sometimes he rides."

"Are the debts in Jersey paid, Jane?"

A shadow passed over her face, and her voice dropped to a whisper.

"No. It makes me feel very unhappy sometimes, half-frightened. Of course papa hopes he shall not be found out here. But he seems to have also two or three old debts in this neighbourhood, and those he is paying off."

The sun, setting right before them in a sea of red clouds, fell upon their faces and lighted up the sadness of Oliver's. Then the red ball sank, on its way to cheer and illumine another part of the world, leaving behind it the changes which set in after sunset. The bright stream became grey, the osiers, bordering it, grew dark. Oliver shook himself. The whole place to him wore a strange air of melancholy. It was early evening yet, for the month was only February; but the spring had come in with a kindly mood, and the weather was bright.

Rising from the bench, they slowly walked up the nearest Inlet, side by side, and gained the high road just as a pony-chaise was passing by, an elderly gentleman and a young lady in it: Mr. and Miss Paul.

"Oh, papa, papa, please pull up!" cried the girl. "There's Jane Preen."

She leaped out, almost before the pony had stopped, and ran to the pathway with outstretched hands.

"How pleasant that we should meet you, Jane! Papa has been taking me for a drive this afternoon."

Oliver stood apart, behind his sister, looking and listening. The speaker was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen, with a blushing, dimpled face, a smiling mouth displaying small white teeth, shy blue eyes, and bright hair. Her straw hat had blue ribbons and her dress was one of light silk. Never in his life, thought Oliver, had he seen so sweet a face or heard so sweet a voice.

"Have you been for a walk?" she asked of Jane.

"No," answered Jane. "We have been down the Inlet, and sitting to watch the sun set. This is my brother, Emma, of whom you have heard. He arrived this afternoon, and has left Tours. Will you let me introduce him to you? Oliver, this is Miss Paul."

Mr. Oliver Preen was about to execute a deep bow at a respectful distance, after the manner of the fashionable blades of Tours, and swung off his hat to begin with; but Emma Paul, who was not fashionable at all, but sociable, inexperienced, and unpretending, held out her hand. She liked his looks; a slender young fellow, in deep mourning, with a fair, mild, pleasing face.

"Papa," she said, turning to the gig, which had drawn up close to the foot-path, "this is Mr. Oliver Preen, from France. He has come home, Jane says."

John Paul, a portly, elderly gentleman, with iron-grey hair and a face that looked stern to those who did not know him, bent forward and shook hands with the stranger.

Emma began plunging into all sorts of gossip, for she liked nothing better than to talk. Jane liked it too.

"I have been telling Oliver we call Duck Brook the fag end of the world, and that it was you who first said it," cried Jane.

"Oh, how could you?" laughed Emma, turning her beaming face upon Oliver. And they might have gone on for ever, if left alone; but Mr. Paul reminded his daughter that it was growing late, and he wanted to get home to dinner. So she lightly stepped into the low chaise, Oliver Preen starting forward to assist her, and they drove off, Emma calling to Jane not to forget that they were engaged to drink tea at North Villa on the morrow.

"What's Preen going to do with that young fellow?" wondered the lawyer, as he drove on.

"I'm sure I don't know, papa," said Emma. "Take him into the Buttery, perhaps."

Old Paul laughed a little at the idea. "Not much more work there than Preen can do himself, I expect."

"When I last saw Jane she said she thought her brother might be coming home. It may be only for a visit, you know."

Old Paul nodded, and touched up the pony.

Oliver stood in the pathway gazing after the chaise until it was out of sight. "What a charming girl!" he cried to his sister. "I never saw one so unaffected in all my life."

II.

If the reader chanced to see two papers that appeared in The Argosy some time ago, entitled "Chandler and Chandler," he may be able to recall North Villa, and those who lived in it.

It stood in the Islip Road—hardly a stone's throw from Crabb

Cot. Jacob Chandler's widow lived in it with her three daughters. She was empty-headed, vain, frivolous, on the high ropes always when in company, wanting to give people the impression that she had been as good as born a Duchess: whereas everyone knew she had sprung from small tradespeople in Birmingham. The three daughters, Clementina, Georgiana, Julietta, took after her, and were as fine as their names.

But you have heard of them before—and of the wrong inflicted by their father, Jacob Chandler, upon his brother's widow and son. The solicitor's business at Islip had been made by the elder brother, Thomas Chandler; he had taken Jacob into partnership, and given him a half share without cross or coin of recompense: and when Thomas died from an accident, leaving his only son Tom in the office to succeed him when he should be of age, Jacob refused to carry out the behest. Ignoring past obligations, all sense of right or wrong, he made his own son Valentine his partner in due course of time, condemning Tom, though a qualified solicitor, to remain his clerk.

It's true that when Jacob Chandler lay on his death-bed, the full sense of what he had done came home to him: any glaring injustice we may have been committing in our lives does, I fancy, often take hold of the conscience at that dread time: and he enjoined his son Valentine to give Tom his due—a full partnership. Valentine having his late father's example before him (for Jacob died), did nothing of the kind. "I'll raise your salary, Tom," said he, "but I cannot make you my partner." So Tom, thinking he had put up with injustice long enough, quitted Valentine there and then. John Paul, the other Islip lawyer, was only too glad to secure Tom for his own office; he made him his manager and paid him a good salary.

About two years had gone on since then. Tom Chandler, a very fine young fellow, honest and good-natured, was growing more and more indispensable to Mr. Paul; Valentine was growing (if the expression may be used) downwards. For Valentine, who had been an indulged son, and only made to work when he pleased, had picked up habits of idleness, and other habits that we are told in our copy-books idleness begets. Gay, handsome, pleasant-mannered, with money always in his pocket, one of those young men sure to be courted, Valentine had grown fonder of pleasure than of work: he liked his game at billiards; worse than that, he liked his glass. When a client came in, ten to one but a clerk had to make a rush to the Bell Inn opposite, to fetch his master; and it sometimes happened that Valentine would not return quite steady. The result was, that his practice was gradually leaving him, to be given to Mr. Paul. All this was telling upon Valentine's mother; she had an ever-haunting dread of the poverty which might result in the future, and was only half as pretentious as she used to be.

Her daughters did not allow their minds to be disturbed by anxiety as yet; the young are less anxious than the old. When she

dropped a word of apprehension in their hearing, they good-humouredly said mamma was fidgetty—Valentine would be all right; if a little gay now it was only what other young men were. It was a pleasant house to visit, for the girls were gay and hospitable; though they did bedeck themselves like so many peacocks, and put on airs and graces.

Jane Preen found it pleasant; had found it so long ago; and she introduced Oliver to it, who liked it because he sometimes met Emma Paul there. It took a very short time indeed after that first meeting by the Inlets for him to be over head and ears in love with her. Thus some weeks went on.

More pure and ardent love than that young fellow's for Emma was never felt by man or woman. It filled his every thought, seemed to sanctify his dreary days at Duck Brook, and made a heaven of his own heart. He would meet her at North Villa, would encounter her sometimes in her walks, now and then saw her at her own house at Islip. Not often—old Mr. Paul did not particularly care for the Preens, and rarely gave Emma leave to invite them.

Emma did not care for *him*. She had not found out that he cared for her. A remarkably open, pleasant girl in manner, to him as to all the world, she met him always with frank cordiality—and he mistook that natural cordiality for a warmer feeling. Had Emma Paul suspected his love for her she would have turned from it in dismay; she was no coquette, and all the first love of her young heart was privately given to someone else.

At this time there was a young man in Mr. Paul's office named Richard MacEveril. He was a nephew of Captain MacEveril of Oak Mansion—a pretty place near Islip. Captain MacEveril—a retired post captain in the Royal Navy—had a brother settled in Australia. When this brother died, his only son, Richard, came over to his relatives, accompanied by a small income, about enough to keep him in coats and waistcoats.

The arrival very much put out Captain MacEveril. He was a good-hearted man, but afflicted with gout in the feet, and irascible when twinges took him. Naturally the question arose to his mind—how was he to put Richard in the way of getting bread and cheese. Richard seemed to have less idea of how it was to be done than his uncle and aunt had. They told him he must go back to Australia and find a living there. Richard objected; said he had only just left it, and did not like Australia. Upon the captain's death, whenever that should take place, Richard would come into a small estate of between two and three hundred a-year, of which nothing could deprive him; for Captain MacEveril had no son; only a daughter, who would be rich through her mother.

Richard was a gay-mannered young fellow and much liked, but he was not very particular. He played billiards at the Bell Inn with Valentine Chandler, with young Scott, and with other idlers;

he hired horses, and dashed across country on their backs ; he spent money in all ways. When his own ready money was gone he went into debt, and people came to the Captain to ask him to liquidate it. This startled and angered the old post captain as no twinge of gout had ever yet done.

"Something must be done with Dick," said Mrs. MacEveril.

"Of course it must," her husband wrathfully retorted ; "but what the deuce is it to be?"

"Can't you get John Paul to take him into his office as a temporary thing? It would keep him out of mischief."

Mrs. MacEveril's suggestion bore fruit. For the present, until something eligible should "turn up," Dick was placed in the lawyer's office as a copying clerk. Mr. Paul made a favour of taking him in ; but he and Captain MacEveril had been close friends for many a year. Dick wrote a bold, clear hand, good for copying deeds.

He and Oliver became intimate. It is said that "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," and they could feel for one another Both were down in life, both had poverty-stricken pockets. They were of the same age, twenty-one, and in appearance were not dissimilar—fair of face, slight in person.

So that Oliver Preen needed no plea for haunting Islip three or four times a week. "He went over to see Dick MacEveril," would have been his answer had any inquisitive body enquired what he did there : while, in point of fact, he went hoping to see Emma Paul—if by delightful chance he might obtain that boon.

Thus matters were going on : Oliver shut up the earlier part of the day in the Buttery with his father, answering letters, and what not ; in the latter part of it he would be at Islip, or perhaps with Jane at North Villa. Sometimes they would walk home together ; or, if they could have the gig, Oliver drove his sister back in it. But for the love he bore Emma, he would have found his life intolerable ; nothing but depression, mortification, disappointment : but when Love takes up its abode in the heart the dreariest lot becomes one of sunshine.

III.

The garden attached to North Villa was large and very old-fashioned : a place crowded with trees and shrubs, intersected with narrow paths and homely flowers. The Malvern hills could be seen in the distance, as beautiful a sight in the early morning, with the lights and shadows lying upon them, as the world can show.

It was summer now, nearly midsummer. The garish day was fading, the summer moon had risen, its round shield so delicately pale as to look like silver ; and Valentine Chandler was pacing the garden with Jane Preen in the moonlight. They had been singing a duet together at the piano, "I've wandered in dreams," and he had taken the accompaniment. He played well ; and never living man had a

sweeter voice than he. They were wandering in dreams of their own, those two, had been for some time now.

Silence between them as they paced the walk; a sort of discomforting, ominous silence. Valentine broke it.

"Why don't you reproach me, Jane?"

"Do I ever reproach you?" she answered.

"No. But you ought to do so."

"If you would only keep your promises, Valentine!"

Young Mr. Valentine Chandler, having stayed his steps while they spoke, backed against the corner of the latticed arbour, which they were just then passing. The same arbour in which his aunt, Mrs. Mary Ann Cramp, had sat in her copper-coloured silk gown to convict her brother Jacob, Valentine's father, of his sins against Tom Chandler, one Sunday afternoon, not so very long gone by.

Val did not answer. He seemed to be staring at the moon, to investigate what it was made of. In reality he saw no moon; neither moon, nor sky above, nor any earthly thing beneath; he only saw his own reckless folly in his mind's clouded mirror.

"You know you do make promises, Valentine!"

"And when I make them I fully mean to keep them; but a lot of idle fellows get hold of me, and—and—I *can't*," said he, in a savage tone.

"But you might," said Jane. "If I made promises I should keep them to you—whatever the temptation."

"I cannot think who it is that comes tattling to you about me, Jane! Is it Oliver?"

"Oliver! Never. Oliver does not know, or suspect—anything."

"Then it must be those confounded girls indoors!"

"Nor they, either. It is not anyone in particular, Valentine; but I hear one and another talking about you."

"I should like to know what they say. You must tell me, Jane."

Jane caught her breath, as if she did not like to answer. But Valentine was waiting.

"They say you are not steady, Val," she spoke in a whisper; "that you neglect your business; that unless you pull up, you will go to the bad."

For a few moments Valentine remained quite still; you might have thought he had gone to sleep. Then he put out his hand, drew Jane gently to him, and bent down his head to her with a long-drawn sigh.

"I *will* pull up, Jane. It is not as ill as story-tellers make out. But I will pull up; I promise you; and I'll begin from this day."

Jane Preen did not like to remind him that he had said the same thing many times before; rather would she trust to his renewed word. When a girl is in love, she has faith in modern miracles.

Valentine held her to him very closely. "You believe me, don't you, my darling?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Down came a voice to them from some remote path near the house, that was anything but a whisper. "Jane! Jane Preen! Are you in the garden? or are you up-stairs with Julietta?"

Jane stole swiftly forward. "I am here, Clementina—it is cool and pleasant in the night air. Do you want me?"

"Your boy is asking how long he is to wait. The horse is fresh this evening, and won't stand."

"Has the gig come!" exclaimed Jane, as she met Miss Clementina. "And has Sam brought it? Why not Oliver?"

Clementina Chandler shook her head and the yellow ribbons which adorned it, intimating that she did not know anything about Oliver. It was the servant boy, Sam, who had brought the gig.

Jane hastily put on her bonnet and scarf, said good-night, and was helped into the gig by Valentine—who gave her hand a tender squeeze as they drove off.

"Where is Mr. Oliver?" she enquired of Sam.

"Mr. Oliver was out, Miss Jane. As it was getting late, the missis told me to get the gig ready, and bring it."

After that, Jane was silent, thinking about Valentine and his renewed promises. It might be that the air was favourable to love catching: anyway, both the young Preens had fallen desperately into it; Jane with Valentine Chandler and Oliver with Emma Paul.

Duck Brook was soon reached, for the horse was swift that evening. On the opposite side of the road to the Inlets, was a large field, in which the grass was down and lying in cocks, the sweet smell of the hay perfuming the air of the summer night. Leaping across this field and then over its five-barred gate into the road, came Oliver Preen. Jane, seeing him, had no need to wonder where he had been.

For across this field and onwards, as straight as the crow flies, was a near way to Islip. Active legs, such as Oliver's, might get over the ground in twenty minutes, perhaps in less. But there was no path, or right of way; he had to push through hedges and charge private grounds, with other impediments attending. Thomas Chandler, conveyancer and Attorney-at-law, had laughingly assured Oliver that if caught using that way, he would of a surety be had up before the justices of the peace for trespass.

"Stop here, Sam," said Jane. "I will get out now."

Sam stopped the gig, and Jane got down. She joined her brother, and the boy drove on to the stables.

"It was too bad, Oliver, not to come for me!" she cried.

"I meant to be home in time; I did indeed, Jane," he answered; "but somehow the evening slipped on."

"Were you at Mr. Paul's?"

"No; I was with MacEveril."

"At billiards, I suppose?—and it's very foolish of you, Oliver, for you know you can't afford billiards."

"I can't afford anything, Janey, as it seems to me," returned Oliver, kicking up the dust in the road as they walked along. "Billiards don't cost much; it's only the tables; anyway, MacEveril paid for all."

"Has MacEveril talked any more about going away?"

"He talks of nothing else; is full of it," answered Oliver. "His uncle says he is not to go; and old Paul stopped him at the first half-word, saying he could not be spared from the office. Dick says he shall start all the same, leave or no leave."

"Dick will be very silly to go just now, when we are about to be so gay," remarked Jane. "There's the picnic coming off; and the dance at Mrs Jacob Chandler's; and no end of tea-parties."

For just now the neighbourhood was putting on a spurt of gaiety, induced to it perhaps by the lovely summer sunshine. Oliver's face wore a look of gloom, and he made no answer to Jane's remark. Several matters, cross and contrary, were trying Oliver Preen; not the least of them that he seemed to make no way whatever with Miss Emma.

When we left school for the midsummer holidays that year, Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley were staying at Crabb Cot. We got there on Friday, the eleventh of June.

On the following Monday morning the Squire went to his own small sitting-room after breakfast to busy himself with his accounts and papers. Presently I heard him call me.

"Have you a mind for a walk, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir; I should be glad of one." Tod had gone to the Whitneys for a couple of days, and without him I felt like a fish out of water.

"Well, I want you to go as far as Massock's. He is a regular cheat, that man, Johnny, needs looking after —— What is it, Thomas?"

For old Thomas had come in, a card between his fingers. "It's Mr. Gervais Preen, sir," he said, in answer, putting the card on the Squire's table. "Can you see him?"

"Oh, yes, I can see him; show him in. Wait a bit, though, Thomas," broke off the Squire. "Johnny, I expect Preen has come about that pony. I suppose we may as well keep him?"

"Tod said on Saturday, sir, that we should not do better," I answered. "He tried him well, and thinks he is worth the price."

"Ay; ten pounds, wasn't it? We'll keep him, then. Mr. Preen can come in, Thomas."

Some few days before this the Squire had happened to say in Preen's hearing that he wanted a pony for the two children to ride, Hugh and Lena. Preen caught up the words, saying he had one for sale—a very nice pony, sound and quiet. So the pony had been sent to Crabb Cot upon trial, and we all liked him. His name was Taffy.

Mr. Preen came into the room, his small face cool and dark as usual; he had driven from Duck Brook. "A fine morning," he remarked, as he sat down; but it would be fiery hot by-and-bye, too hot for the middle of June, and we should probably pay for it later. The Squire asked if he would take anything, but he declined.

"What of the pony—Taffy—Squire?" went on Mr. Preen. "Do you like him."

"Yes, we like him very well," said the Squire, heartily, "and we mean to keep him, Preen."

"All right," said Mr. Preen. "You will not repent it."

Then they fell to talking of horses in general, and of other topics. I stayed on, sitting by the window, not having received the message for Massock. Mr. Preen stayed also, making no move to go away; when it suddenly occurred to the Squire—he mentioned it later—that perhaps Preen might be waiting for the money.

"Ten pounds, I think, was the price agreed upon," observed the Squire with ready carelessness. "Would you like to be paid now?"

"If it does not inconvenience you."

The Squire unlocked his shabby old bureau, which stood against the wall, fingered his stock of money, and brought forth a ten-pound bank-note. This he handed to Preen, together with a sheet of paper, that he might give a receipt.

When the receipt was written, Mr. Preen took up the note, looked at it for a moment or two, and then passed it back again.

"Would you mind writing your name on this note, Squire?"

The Squire laughed gently. "Not at all," he answered; "but why should I? Do you think it is a bad one? No fear, Preen; I had it from the Old Bank at Worcester."

"No, I do not fear that," said Preen, speaking quietly. "But since a disagreeable trouble which happened to me some years ago, I have always liked, when receiving a bank-note, to get, if possible, the donor's name upon it in his own handwriting."

"What was the trouble?"

"I was playing cards at the house of a man of fashion, who was brother to an Earl, and lived in a fashionable square at the West End of London, and I had a ten-pound note paid me, for I won, by a man who, I understood, had recently retired with honours from the army, a Major D——. I will not give you his name. The next day, or next but one, I paid this note away to a tradesman, and it was found to be forged; cleverly forged," repeated Preen, with emphasis.

"What did you do?" asked the Squire.

"I got Major D.'s address from the house where we had played, carried the note to him, and enquired what it meant and whence he got it. Will you believe, Mr. Todhetley," added the speaker, with slight agitation, "that the man utterly repudiated the note, saying ——"

"But how could he repudiate it?" interrupted the Squire, interested in the tale.

"He said it was not the note he had paid me; he stood it out in the most impudent manner. I told him, and it was the pure truth, that it was impossible there could be any mistake. I was a poor man, down on my luck just then, and it was the only note I had had about me for some time past. All in vain. He held to it that it was not the note, and there the matter ended. I could not prove that it was the note except by my bare word. It was my word against his, you see, and naturally I went to the wall."

The Squire nodded. "Who was at the loss of the money?'

"I was. Besides that, I had the cold shoulder turned upon me. Major D. was believed; I was doubted; some people went so far as to say I must have trumped up the tale. For some time after that I would not take a bank-note from any man unless he put his signature to it, and it has grown into a habit with me. So, if you don't mind, Squire ——"

The Squire smiled goodnaturedly, drew the bank-note to him, and wrote upon the back in a corner, "J. Todhetley."

"There, Preen," said he, returning it, "I won't repudiate that. Couldn't if I would."

Mr. Preen put the note into his pocket-book, and rose to leave. We strolled with him across the front garden to the gate, where his gig was waiting.

"I have to go as far as Norton; and possibly after that on to Stoulton," he remarked, as he took the reins in his hand and got in.

"You will have a hot drive of it," said the Squire.

"Yes; but if one undertakes business it must be attended to," said Preen, as he drove off.

And for the mysterious doubt and difficulty which the payment of that bank-note to Mr. Preen brought about, leading onwards to the tragedy fated to be its ending, we must wait until next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

IN THE BORDER-LAND.

Thou comest all too late!
  My life-long dream has left my aching heart!
For moment dear as this I long did wait,
  But now love's hopes and I are far apart!
The dews of death are falling on my face:
In life's great issues I have now no place!—
  Thou comest all too late!

The time was when I loved!
  When, with my feet bound in Love's sandals bright,
From that dire gloom wherein thou long hadst moved,
  I vainly tried to guide thy steps to light!
When deep, to save thee, in the tainted sea,
I stretched the arm thou cast in scorn from thee!—
  The time was when I loved!

My heart was all thine own!
  It might have been by thy love glorified,
But it was torn from off its chosen throne:—
  What wonder that ere this I have not died?
I gave thee love fresh as the virgin morn,
And for requital I received thy scorn!—
  My heart was all thine own!

Thou comest now in tears!
  'Tis well that I have seen them ere I rest:
They shall baptise anew the darkened years,
  And bless a life that has been long unblest!
My heart is opened with new love for thee:
Thy sorrow sweet hath been the master-key!—
  Thou comest now in tears!

For earth's love thou art late!
  Yet in thy solemn grief kneel by my side,
Till for my longing soul Heaven's jasper gate
  By shining seraphs shall be opened wide!
I've found thy love again as all grows dim,
And it shall richer make Heaven's holy hymn!—
  Sweet soul! not yet too late!

Alexander Lamont

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

Marstrand.

MANY enquiries as to the best way of reaching Sweden by sea pointed to the crossing from Hull to Gothenburg. The passage was shorter and the boats were better. As it turned out, the boat for that particular date was rather worse. The ordinary vessel had gone off to the East to carry out healthy troops and bring others back invalided, by order of the great Circumlocution Office; and for the present this small boat had taken her place.

"Express leaves King's Cross at 9.15; excellent train," said the Pall Mall office of the boat in question, in tones which inferred that if the train did not actually run you on board, at the very least it put you alongside. Imagine, then, one's "feelings," when, on reaching Selby at 1.30 a.m., and in utter darkness, the door was thrown open by a porter with the paralysing announcement:

"Change here for Hull."

"And wait how long?" was the natural question.

"Train due at 4.30, sir; generally behind time."

Four-thirty, and it was now half-past one. Three hours at the least, in the depth of a cold, almost frosty night—though the month was July—at a small country junction; a waiting room about six feet square feebly lighted by a small gas-burner, cold, cheerless, and dirty; a table in a corner strewn with decaying cabbage leaves; one man snoring at full length on a bench, another vainly trying to imitate him upon a chair. To take up one's quarters in such a den was not

to be thought of. Two half tipsy soldiers, as they afterwards showed up, were sprawling on a bench outside in the dark. And here one was expected to remain patiently for three hours or longer, without using strong language or otherwise proving that there are limits to the endurance of human nature.

The only other traveller who had alighted was a pleasant young Swede, on his way to his native country. Companions in misfortune are inevitably attracted towards each other. Under such circumstances an hour's time may do the work of weeks or months. Before long we had become quite old friends, with only one cause of regret in common—that the Pall Mall office and the Railway Company were not able to hear all the well-merited abuse showered down upon their offending heads.

The hours dragged their slow lengths away. As Selby station was in the blackness of darkness we strolled about the town. It was plunged in silence and slumber; in darkness also, for the streets were not lighted. No "pallid rays" made that darkness yet more visible, either from ancient oil or modern gas; the moon did not give her light, and stars faintly and feebly flickered. Had we been dying for a cup of tea—and we would almost have paid for it in gold—it was not to be purchased. A solitary watchman kept guard over a fire in a street undergoing repairs, the one exception to the death-in-life state of things apparently reigning here. Not even a dog or cat crossed our path during those silent hours; and we wondered, concerning the cats, whether this mysterious immunity was the result of air guns, or of some enlightened town law forbidding the propagation of these disturbers of the midnight peace; or whether, finding something in the air of Selby disagree with them, they had betaken themselves and their orgies to less happy and serene regions.

Every time we passed, the old watchman gazed in consternation, as if wondering whether we were ghosts walking the earth until cock-crow. Once when we stopped to speak to him, he visibly shivered in his shoes, and stirred his fire into a blaze, and was altogether so terrified that we had pity and passed on. Well he might. Who but ghosts would patrol a silent and sleeping town for hours in the dead of night?—Ghosts or unhappy beings fast qualifying for the land of shadows through the barbarities of a Pall Mall office, or the criminal arrangements of a still more barbarous railway company The river on our right looked cold and sluggish, the flat country beyond, bare, bleak and desolate.

One slight compensation we had—also of a ghostly kind—in tracing the outlines of the grand old church, substantial and stately in the darkness, surrounded by quiet graves and sleeping dead. As the dawn broke in the East, the church growing more visible grew also more solemn and beautiful: a dignified Gothic pile with a splendid west front. But even here we were not to be altogether gratified. The churchyard, surrounded by railings, and the gates, locked and

bolted, made it impossible to get within many yards of the building. "Safe bind, safe find," may be the motto of the Selbyites, but here there was nothing but the dead to steal, and they surely are sacred?

The longest night has an end, and our train came up at last. But the hands of Selby church clock had pointed to five before we left the station behind us. Three hours and a half since we had turned out into cold and darkness. Exhausted human nature was so demoralised that the smell of the pine-apples packed in baskets on the platform well nigh tempted one to break the eighth commandment and throw prudence to the winds.

Hull at last, also in a state of repose; houses closed, blinds down. Two flys at the station, one of which we secured. A tug at the landing-stage, waiting to convey us to a vessel some six or seven hundred yards from the shore: looking in the distance so small and ugly, we heard she was the Gothenburg steamer with feelings of dismay. It was the last straw. From first to last we felt we had been snared and deluded.

But every cloud has a silver lining. Once on board, the first thing to reconcile one to the inevitable was an unlimited supply of tea, not only refreshing, but life-giving after a night spent in the streets of Selby. Second conciliatory item was to hear that small though the boat, she was almost the fastest in the service. Finally, she was commanded by an agreeable and kindly captain.

We started on Saturday morning. The sea, calm as a mill-pond, remained calm throughout. Sunset and Sunday night found us among the vicissitudes of the capricious Cattegat: a very lovely scene. The sun went down, and the waters were flushed and splendid as the brilliant heavens they reflected. Countless rocks and islands were tipped with gold. Twilight fell, but darkness came not. That everchanging sky and water wrapped us all in a dream of beauty. We were no longer on earth, but in some glorious land unknown to darkness and night; unknown to anything but soft and balmy airs, and skies rainbow tinted and infinitely more gorgeous. Here and there upon the rocks, a bird standing out in clear outline gazed with solemn suspicion at the advancing monster; only, as we approached, to take wing with wild clang, and give warning to other birds, of whom possibly it was the watchman. Then a whole flock would perch upon some far-off rock and once more settle down to harmony and repose.

Sweden's long, low shores gradually became less barren and deserted. Houses singly or in small colonies declared themselves, and every now and then bonfires flared and blue lights shot up into the sky. The Swedes were evidently amusing themselves after their own heart, and devoting Sunday evening to fireworks and fêtes champêtres. No schoolboy can be fonder of coloured lights and illuminations of any sort than they. A rocket hissing into the air will bring down, not only the stick, but showers of applause; squibs, crackers, and Roman candles put them simply beside themselves.

In the deepening gloom it seemed an endless steaming upwards into the land, for the mouth of the Göta elf is full five miles from the town. The water narrowed, the banks on either side grew more and more indistinct, but long before reaching Gothenburg we discerned how, on ordinary days, they must be full of life and activity. Timber and dockyards, ironworks and forges—labour of every kind found a home here.

At length Gothenburg, the landing stage and the Custom House: the latter a large, long building, with which we were to have nothing to do to-night. Officers boarded us to clear hand-bags and any small luggage one needed for present use. Then, leaving

GOTHENBURG.

the remainder for the next morning, we set foot on Swedish soil as the clock struck midnight.

So a first impression of Sweden was gathered in the darkness of the witching hour—for darkness had now fallen. It was a perfect night, the stars brilliant and large as we do not see them in England. The sky looked an immense purple dome, overshadowing the fair city. It was quiet and sleeping; streets were deserted; no sound except the rattling of the truck in the distance bearing one's luggage towards the hotel. Our acquaintance with sleeping towns and midnight strolls was becoming frequent and familiar.

Under this night sky, this solemn silence, Gothenburg seemed well built and imposing: wide thoroughfares, substantial houses, and canals running through the streets. So, under the broad light of day, it proved. If Stockholm has been called the Venice of the

North, Gothenburg may surely be called its Rotterdam. And with more reason, for the Dutch had no concern with the rise and progress of Stockholm, but much to do with the early days of Gothenburg. Hence a probable reason for the existence of its canals.

But there all likeness ceases. The houses look quite new, with much interior comfort, no doubt, but little outward beauty. They might have been brought bodily from a Paris boulevard, or any other modern city, and planted here. Very different the aspect of Rotterdam, with its quaint old houses, gabled, pointed, and picturesque; its tree-lined streets and quays, its multitude of barges on the canals with flags gaily flying in the breeze, and harmonizing so well with the bright blue sky and ancient buildings. There is nothing of all this in Gothenburg. Few trees to cast their shadows athwart the hot pavement, whilst the canals seem to have been made less for use than ornament. For one barge quietly moored here or making its way through the city, in Rotterdam you will see a hundred.

The hot pavement—and how hot it can be in Gothenburg! The inhabitants themselves say it is built in a hole, and if this be exaggeration, it is certainly placed in a depression: surrounded by hills, which, invisible from the town, are apparent enough the moment you leave it. Consequently Gothenburg is sheltered, hot and enervating. But the intense heat of those first few days only too soon gave place to a reversed temperature. It was so much Hard Labour only to breathe or move about. In spite of those wide thoroughfares there seemed a want of air difficult to account for.

Few travellers stay here long. Those on pleasure bent touch at Gothenburg for two reasons: it is the nearest port from England, and it is the starting point for reaching Stockholm by the Gotha canal; one of the things absolutely to be done in Sweden. Some say they prefer coming down the canal *from* Stockholm; but that is a mere spirit of contrariety. We have a friend largely endowed with this quality, and know what it means. Open doors and windows ought to be closed, and *vice versâ*. If the wind is north, lamentations that it is not south; if west, why is it not east? In reply to the usual polite enquiry, they are pretty well, but expect to feel very differently in an hour's time. If unusually well yourself and in good spirits, they declare that you look very hollow about the eyes, haggard and careworn, whilst this unnatural cheerfulness is a sure sign of approaching evil. It is not at all an uncommon type of character, but socially disastrous.

But if Gothenburg has its disadvantages (what place on earth has not? Where will you find perfection? Human nature itself would rebel against such a state of things), it has much to be thankful for. Large, and commercially prosperous, it breathes forth an air of wealth and general self-satisfaction. Its humblest merchants appear to have their country retreats, more or less extensive, and those who cannot

boast this privilege have any number of islands or inland resorts, where they may spend the hot summer months of the year, and lay up for themselves a store of health for the long and trying winters of their land.

And for those who have to remain stationary all the year round, there are the parks, where of an evening they may listen to the town band, with more or less edification, according as they are of a frivolous or serious, light or classical turn of mind. As a rule, in Sweden, the frivolous tone seemed to predominate.

Joining Norway, allied to it by circumstances if not in heart, one endows the Swedes with the sober, sterling qualities of the Norwegians. One makes a mistake—an ordinary result where supposition and not fact forms the basis of reflection. Therefore was I surprised to find the Swedes opposed to the Norwegians in disposition and temper. No doubt there is a multitude of exceptions, and to judge a nation without seeing much of its interior and domestic life is not only dangerous, but almost impossible. In passing through a country, nevertheless, however superficially, if you observe at all and think about the matter, you must form some idea of its people. Judged by this standard, the Swedes are not a very serious, or, apparently, a very religious nation. They claim the reputation of being more civilised and refined, considerably in advance of the Norwegians, but if they gain in one way, they certainly lose in another.

Both men and women often become abnormally stout, and their manner of living rather encourages such a result. Before the chief meals of the day is a sort of digestive prologue, called smörgasbord. Knife or fork in one hand, a large piece of bread, or thin, flat biscuit in the other, they circulate round a table, groaning with small dainties, weighing with grave looks what will most tempt the present mood. A fork is plunged into the anchovy jar, a small fish is captured, approved, disposed of, and a second succeeds it. This is followed by other dainties. A wine-glass or two of the neat spirit of the country, nauseous and unwholesome, brings this preliminary repast to a conclusion. Seats are then taken at the general table, and the heavier meal commences.

Their outdoor amusements seem equally unsatisfactory. It was difficult even to hear good music, though the Swedes are really musical. Classical pieces were for the most part tabooed by their bands, and gave place to light operatic airs and dances. Their best performances under the circumstances were their own quaint and curious compositions, often very original, with crude harmonies and modulations that led one into unexpected regions musical, and were full of the wild spirit of the north.

There are drives about Gothenburg which take you into park-like grounds, laid out with ponds and artificial waters and trees of every shade and variety; others ending in high barren heaths, where dog-

roses grow in wild and very lovely profusion, and extensive views of the surrounding neighbourhood are found. But there is so much of this hilly, rocky heath that it leaves behind it a general impression of a poor and barren neighbourhood. The finest views overlook the harbour and the shipping, and all the life upon the waters; steamers and vessels of all sorts and conditions constantly coming and going; the ceaseless, noisy industry of the banks of the Göta elf. Gothenberg is quite five miles from the sea, and the passage up the river, interesting as it is by reason of the rocks and islands that are passed, and the life and industry of its shores, yet seems interminable. It is something like steaming up a Norwegian fjord, but with a difference. In place of wildness and grandeur, poetry and romance, you have here the spirit of enterprise and commerce; a power which, after all, rules the world, and will do so to the end of time.

The hotels of Gothenburg—to descend to the commonplace and the practical—are not good. There is a prosaic and commercial air about them which perhaps is only becoming in this prosperous and commercial city. Black, brass-bound boxes meet you on every landing, and many German names prove that here, as elsewhere, the Teutonic element has made unto itself a foothold, a local habitation, and a name. In point of fact, many of the resident merchants of Gothenburg are German, whilst the head of all is a Scotchman. Steamers running to and fro bear Scotch names. If you happen to be on a steamer yourself, deep in some book or an absent mood, and suddenly look up, you might at the first moment fancy yourself on the Clyde, or steaming out of Leith harbour: awaking only after a confused interval to the fact that you are in Swedish waters.

The best hotel is Hauglund's. The Göta Källare, over the way, is in the same hands, but the rooms are said to be inferior. As there is no restaurant at Hauglund's, everyone has to cross to the Göta Källare for meals. The separate restaurant method is found in nearly all Swedish hotels, each meal paid for at the time, and table d'hôte almost unknown. It is not a pleasant system on the whole, and its advantages are all in favour of the landlord. Unfortunately, it has become rather universal, not only in Sweden, but elsewhere.

One soon discovers, also, that many of the hotels have two prices, one for their own countrymen and Germans, another for the English: the latter charges about fifty per cent. above the former. It is a system, possibly, not confined to Sweden and the North, and as the Germans have lately taken it into their heads to travel in flocks and detachments, to the discomfort of the English if not to their own edification, they reap a signal benefit by this arrangement.

But to dismiss grievances—for travelling is not now what it has been in the past, and the days for the Grand Tour as it was done by our forefathers are ended. Then, nine travellers out of every ten possessed that freemasonry of culture and refinement which marked the man of gentle birth and breeding. Thrown together, by chance

or otherwise, they added the charms of companionship to the beauties of nature, and ties were formed and friendships made which lasted as long as life itself. But those days are over. Chance acquaintances with quiet tastes and unoffending ways are growing more and more rare. Only a few days since, in a letter received from a friend, who for the last year has been travelling slowly about Italy and the Tyrol, the following sentence occurred: "We find travelling about here, and indeed everywhere, quite different from what it was ten or fifteen years ago, and far less pleasant. Throughout the whole past year we have scarcely met a single nice person, hardly one with whom we cared to form an acquaintance. What has become of all the nice people? Surely

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they still travel, for to come into occasional contact with other countries is a necessity. But if they travel, how do they do it, and where do they hide themselves?"

So, in the changed aspect of the world, and of things in general, you can only go your quiet way with a mind calm and unruffled, steering a straight course through the gathering crowds and avoiding unnecessary pitfalls. And though this digression should seem invidious or uncharitable, it is neither one nor the other. Truth can never be that, and this is the mere statement of a simple, growing and recognised fact.

After all, what can take from the beauties of creation? They elevate the mind and whisper rapture to the soul and carry you for the time being out of the world to the very gates of Heaven, admitting you, not into the Holy of Holies, but to some sort of silent, mysterious

communion, whose influence should never pass away. Those on whom nature does not produce this effect cannot read her face, or hear her voice, or understand her secrets. For them her best and greatest powers are lost. Yet they are there for everyone, and everyone may take of them. It is a dangerous thing to look upon them indifferently, as of the light handling of a sacred subject, for one almost feels that he who is not the better for these beauties must be the worse. Cultivate, then, all powers of appreciation; search for beauties and they will be found; not only in the broad lines and trumpet tones of the blue sky and glowing sunshine, in the towering snow-capped mountains, the sleeping valleys, and the rolling, restless ocean; but in the still small voices of nature: in the very glinting and rustling of the leaves, the murmuring of the stream, the velvet of the greensward, the smallest hedgerow flower, the soft fanning of summer breezes. Nature has many voices, and her beauties all harmonize in one ever-sounding Hymn of Praise, whose mission is to proclaim their Great Original and declare the Hand that made them is Divine.

My Swedish travelling companion, of Selby recollection, left the day after our arrival in Gothenburg for his southern home, and that same night E. came down from Christiania, where for many months he had been studying day and day, and wasting too much of the midnight oil. Books now thrown aside for many weeks, he had nothing to do but to enjoy himself, and lay up a store of strength and energy for next year's work. Together we were to acquaint ourselves with many parts of Sweden. Here, however, was no chance companion, for E. was a Norwegian friend of long standing. Our present arrangement was no new experience.

The very next day, bidding a short but not reluctant farewell to Gothenburg, we set out in a small steamer for Marstrand, one of the islands of the Cattegat; largest and most frequented of the group. Here the people of Gothenburg and other places migrate for the summer months. It is considered a fashionable watering-place, though life is of the most primitive description. But Swedish fashion, very different from English, is marked by a simplicity we should do well to imitate. Here they bathe and sail, and lead a quiet, unexciting life, altogether charming and healthful, invigorating to mind and body.

It was a brilliant morning, sky and sea flooded with sunshine. Our boat passed down between the lively, noisy banks of the elf. We steered in and out of the rocks and small islands, and presently found ourselves in the more open sea. But here, too, were rocks and islands in all directions, apparently below water as much as above it, for their reflections were deep and clear. Long stretches of low, barren, rocky coast looked as though they might be the home of wild birds, but could never become the habitations of man.

Here and there, on small detached rocks, rested a seal, that, twisting about its small head at the approach of an enemy, took alarm, and dived into safer regions.

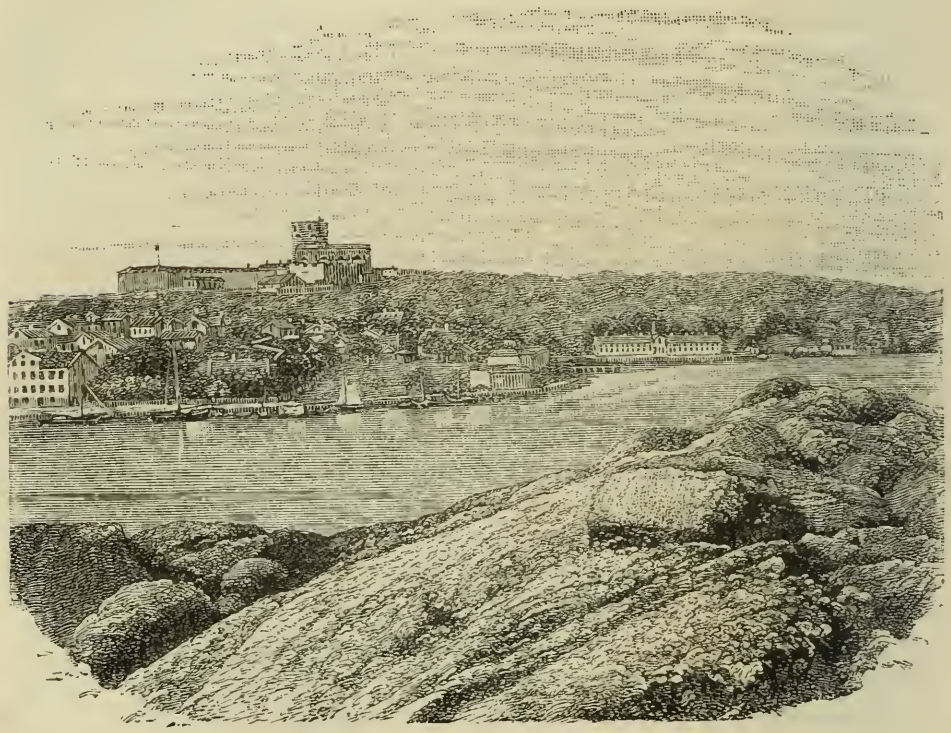
We had a lively old gentleman on board, who making himself excessively agreeable and almost paternal, seemed inclined to take us under his wing for the remainder of our stay in these waters. He was not going to Marstrand to remain there, but had a place of his own on "Cow Island," immediately opposite Marstrand, a habitation he infinitely preferred. One of those men who would take the whole world under their wing, he appeared unable to meet people without performing some kind action, and leaving behind him some goodly token by way of everlasting remembrance. Conversational and communicative, he gave us his whole life and pedigree; told how he was a merchant in Gothenburg, had an only son who had spent some years in England, and spoke English as a native. Had we been going to remain long in these parts he would have placed him at our entire disposal; an arrangement, we thought, the son might have objected to, unless the very counterpart of his father. Finally, if we could not find accommodation in Marstrand, he offered to put us up on Cow Island, and to make us as comfortable as circumstances permitted.

The boat went her way in calm waters, and only those who know the Cattegat in her mild moods can realise what this means. Sea gulls perched upon the rocks, and flew clanging and screaming in our wake. Here and there a porpoise rolled over in long, lazy swims, as if it felt that in such weather it decidedly had the best of it—as no doubt it had. Presently we reached a passage in the islands so narrow that it seemed impossible for our boat to pass through. There was, however, sufficient room, and not a foot to spare. The small island on the left, evidently cultivated at the cost of immense pains and industry, had been made to bear grain and grass, and here and there a potato crop. A very few houses were also visible, but whether they had sprung from the earth, like the wheat, or had been placed there by the hand of man, seemed really doubtful. One was so near our narrow channel that we could almost shake hands with a man who stood in his own doorway. A dog came out and ran beside us, and our communicative friend said he expected toll in the form of biscuit or bone from every vessel that passed. If his rights were withheld he very properly objected. The little animal was forgotten to-day by accident or design, and his indignant remonstrance followed us out of sight and sound.

Soon after this, Marstrand loomed up; an island, picturesque and primitive and tolerably well covered with houses. A half-ruined, grey, abandoned fort, built upon the water's edge, looked out seawards, and the summit of the hill was crowned by a strongly fortified castle. At the landing-stage the old gentleman signalled out the hotel porter from the crowd, and gave him sundry directions confiding

us to his especial care ; directions received with an awe and obedience that seemed to declare him a sort of Lord Paramount of the settlement. Our traps were handed over, our fellow-traveller bade us a demonstrative farewell, again begged us to go over to him on Cow Island if we were not comfortable, and each went his way.

Cow Island was on the other side the harbour, and for a long sojourn certainly looked more open and inviting than Marstrand. There was a special brightness upon it; a wonderfully cool and cleanly look about its few long, low, red and white houses, with their slanting roofs. Luxurious balconies also, where one might sit all day long, and lounge and read ; or lazily watch Marstrand opposite,



MARSTRAND, FROM COW ISLAND.

with its imposing fortress ; or the boats sailing about with white wings spread ; or the ferryman going to and fro between the two islands with his ever changing freight.

But as our object was to see and explore Marstrand, we determined, come what would, to make the best of it, and followed the guide. It was an uphill and somewhat intricate way to the hotel, which, when reached, looked very primitive and unofficial. There seemed some doubt also as to whether we could be accommodated. After a great deal of running about, and mysterious conferences, and evident reference to the old gentleman of Cow Island, two rooms about the size of nutshells were discovered and placed at our disposal. But even these would not be at liberty until the present occupants had

departed by the two o'clock boat for Gothenburg. Until that time we must be content to remain in the condition of waifs and strays.

One felt very much out of the world. Everything was on a primitive scale, in itself novel and refreshing. Although so many people come here year after year, for rest and bathing and harmless recreation, nothing has sprung up in the shape of fashionable hotels, or piers, or promenades. Yet we soon found that everything in the inn was well if simply done, and its wines were the best and most reasonable we found in all Sweden. The first word to arrest attention on the menu of the day was "Jerusalem Soup," a comical name, which seemed peculiar to Marstrand, for we never met with it again. Whether it

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referred to the artichoke or to a special receipt brought over from the East, never transpired. E. even went so far as to remark that the soup might have some mysterious connection with the ponies of that name: a suggestion discarded with a haste that was in itself suspicious. The napkins at the various small tables were tied with a coquettish sort of ribbon, and as numerals did not seem to have travelled so far, cards and names on paper distinguished one from another. Where special attention was wished to be shown, small bouquets further adorned the place reserved for each happy favourite.

I was the only Englishman on the island—where few English are ever seen—and, as such, became an object of general attention. A visit from the late lamented Jumbo could hardly have created greater surprise. People evidently and audibly wondered whether we had

come to spy out their land, or discover the secrets of their fortifications, or whether this Madeira of Sweden, as it is called, was being tried as a last remedy for consumption.

The island itself, without being startling, is interesting. So far out of the world, so removed from all its hubble bubble, so primitive and simple, it could scarcely be otherwise. It is hilly, irregularly built over, without plan or design, and most of the houses are sheltered. None occupy the summit of the hill; none face the open sea, or have that much to be desired prospect, a far off horizon. The chief part of the place faces Cow Island, with only the harbour between, a very pretty and interesting view, but limited. Some of the streets lead up steep hill sides. Small houses, most of them probably devoted to lodgings, are perched in all sorts of singular and apparently dangerous places. The ground floor of one will look on to the roof of another, and it was sometimes difficult, on coming unexpectedly to the back of a house, to know how to get round to the front. The place is sufficiently advanced to have a band, but its numbers were limited and its execution was modest.

The walks about Marstrand were also limited, but pleasant; whether going round the quay and skirting the harbour, or climbing to the back of the island and gazing out seawards, or making a pilgrimage to the castle that crowned the hill, whence you obtained an extensive and splendid view. They are wonderfully careful about this castle. Foreigners are never admitted within its precincts, and if by chance or stratagem one manages to obtain entrance, consternation ensues. It is very strongly fortified, and is called the Gibraltar of the North. With the name all possible resemblance ceases.

Of all places in Marstrand it was the most to be enjoyed: for though not admitted within the castle, you may haunt the ramparts and outer fortifications at your pleasure. You have it very much to yourself, and may spend days here, reclining upon the green slopes in undisturbed possession, asking for nothing better. Free, wild, primitive, out of the world, is your life. You may lie and dream, or read, or gaze at the clouds, and few will intrude upon your solitude. Marstrand lies at your feet, the harbour surrounds you, Cow Island is opposite, with its little cluster of white and red Swiss-like roofs; boats are flitting about, or venturing out to sea; the free winds of heaven play about you. It is perfect rest; rest of body and mind and spirit. Not everyone knows all that this implies. But it is all very quiet, and they who like gaiety or excitement must never think of Marstrand for a moment. To them it would be nothing but a weariness to the flesh.

We went over to Cow Island that afternoon, but our late fellow traveller was not to be seen. Possibly he was taking a siesta, or perhaps he was out shooting. Scarcely a soul did we meet, so it may be that they were *all* taking siestas. A wild looking, uncultivated place, with rocky undulations rather than hills; masses of grey stone

that would remain barren to the end of time, where not even a fern or weed could take root. Here and there was a small pond or lake, well stocked with fish possibly, but we saw no one to give us information. The place seemed abandoned, and we in possession. Even in the small settlement, we had not come across a living creature; and the little group of houses quickly left behind, we had plunged into solitude and desolation as perfect as it must have been in the days of Adam. Taking the only road to be seen, it presently led us to a very proper and characteristic spot for such an atmosphere—the churchyard, where the dead rest in scarcely greater silence and solitude than the living.

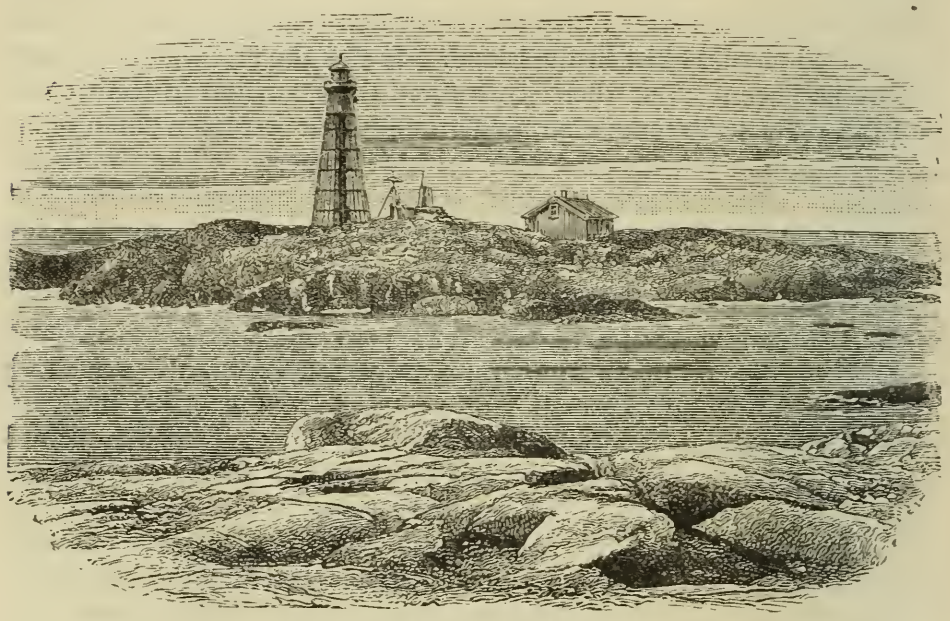
Suddenly we heard the sound of wheels, and immediately after came up a driver with a wagonette and pair of horses. Clumsy and original though the whole turn-out, it seemed impossible that anything so civilised should exist in the island. It was the first sign of animate life we had seen. But there it was, and the man agreed to drive us, and did drive us to some charming grounds that seemed a compromise between public tea gardens and private property. They were too well kept to be in any way public, yet we were evidently at liberty to roam about in all directions. A summer house or pavilion—a sort of garden boudoir, elegantly appointed—invited us to enter and explore. Sounds of life and harmony within, and voices sweet and clear, yet further tempted and seemed to lure us onwards. We resisted with superhuman strength, and passed on to the sea shore, a bathing house and a small landing stage, round which the calm blue waters of the sea lapped and flashed in the sunshine with a soothing and refreshing sound. Oh, for a plunge in their cool depths! The island rounded in a lovely green curve which formed a bay or crescent. Looking outward towards the far off horizon was like gazing towards the confines of the earth, the end of time and space. Altogether the most secluded little paradise possible, a perfect surprise and astonishment in this hitherto barren and rocky looking island: a green oasis in a desert land.

Jehu took us back the way we had come. There seemed indeed no possibility of varying the route, and probably it was the only existing road in the island. Depositing us once more at the little settlement of houses, still quiet and deserted as when we had landed, he departed, one hardly knew how or where. Surely the place was under a spell, and everyone had been put to sleep for a hundred years? The presence alone of our jovial and kind-hearted fellow traveller ought to have filled the island and made itself abundantly manifest; yet nothing was seen or heard of him, and only a flag flying in the breeze marked his habitation. It was always flying when he was there, he had told us; a sort of regal intimation that the king was in residence. Vive le roi!

The old ferryman was plying to and fro, and quiet though the place, seldom crossed without a fare. From Cow Island, Marstrand itself

looked imposing. Houses lined the shores, some quite large and consequential. Old fruit women guarded their stalls in one long row upon the quay. Away to the left was the grey, abandoned fort, looking seawards through the straits of the harbour, watching for an enemy that did not come and never meant to come: a remnant of bygone days; a silent witness to departed glories. Round went the land, an emerald in the setting of a pearly sea. Above the town rose castle and ramparts, a dignified crown to the small, interesting island. Guns and sentries and all the paraphernalia of war might be there, but they were all out of sight. From this point the fortress looked the essence of peace and security.

We crossed over. The afternoon was waning, and all Marstrand



MARSTRAND.

seemed to have turned out for promenade. Ladies in cotton gowns, fashionably made, marked the beauty of Marstrand, and young men with slim canes evidently thought they formed its grace. Of course there was much flirting; in this respect human nature is the same all the world over; but it seemed all very innocent and primitive; so many shepherds and shepherdesses playing out their little pastorals. One large sailing boat after another—fine boats they were, with their spotless white sails—put out to sea. Voices in laughter rose upon the air, and here and there the swelling harmonies of song were wafted to the land. Life was evidently very pleasant and enjoyable, and let it be repeated, seemed innocent and beautiful: a free, frank, manly and maidenly appearance that rejoiced the heart.

That evening we went up the heights and watched the sunset. It was a brilliant night. The sky was flushed with all its colours, and small rosy clouds sailed leisurely towards the east. Red and flashing

was the water as the sun went down. One or two lingering boats were quietly making for the harbour. Everyone on land had gone in to supper: pastorals were suspended for realities. We had the place, the whole place, as it seemed, to ourselves. Perfect silence and solitude. E. fell into a melancholy reverie; it was too much for him. In truth, the departed sun, the utter stillness of earth, sea and sky was almost too palpable, and became oppressive. It seemed a death in nature, the end of life, the consummation of all things—of which it is at least the emblem. We sat long, until the rosy sky had given place to grey twilight, and the flush upon the water had disappeared.

Then we also went down. People were coming out again to enjoy the cool of the evening and the modest band, whilst couples wandered about under the shade of the trees and pretended to be listening, and not to be utterly and altogether absorbed in each other. Darkness fell upon the earth, and enwrapped the little place. Even Cow Island could only be distinguished by a few twinkling lights, where possibly our fellow traveller was entertaining the festive board with an account of his journey from Gothenburg; and how an Englishman was encamped in Marstrand; and what a flurry the Castle would be in when it became known; and how the Guard would be doubled and the keys of the great gates would be placed under special custody.

For ourselves we thought nothing of all this, but in innocence of heart and rectitude of intention, we sought our pillows, and, rocked in the cradle of the Cattegat, slept the sleep of the just.

THE NEST.

From the French of Sully Prudhomme.

How sweet are children in their thoughts and ways!
One said to-day, when his soft hand I prest:
"Because you say you love us children, sir,
I bring you here a present of a nest."

"A nest, my child? A graceful gift indeed!
How can I tell thee all the charming things
A nest can speak of! It is feathered skill—
Sweet morning music—joy—and growing wings.

"A happy island in a sea of leaves,
It rests secure 'mid blue or cloudy skies,
A little home of warm familiar love,
Yet high o'er earth and near to heaven it lies.

"Ah me! I weary of my lonely road,
My hidden cares, my silent hearth unblest.
Find me, dear child, the dove for whom I long,
And I accept thy present of a nest."

Alex. Hayes.

MISS JOLLIBERT'S PROPOSAL

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C."

MISS JOLLIBERT was a handsome woman. There were people who said she was cold-looking, and people who said she was passée, and people who said she had a decided will of her own; but no one who denied that she was handsome. And they generally added with a nod and a lowering of the voice: "And rich!" in a way which seemed to say, that if Miss Jollibert's looks were undeniable, yet still more undeniable were her riches.

People were quite right—Miss Jollibert was cold-looking. She was a woman with an athletic upright figure, a haughtily-cut brunette face, a rather high Roman nose, and a rather high colour. And Miss Jollibert had a decided will of her own; her eyes were of the dark, lazy, mysterious type, which are as good as a sign-post pointing to it. As for being passée—of course, strictly speaking, she was passée; Miss Jollibert was thirty-three; and most women are passée at twenty-seven, let alone thirty-three. Mince matters as one likes that is the long and the short of it.

On the other hand, many women of Miss Jollibert's type are positively handsomer at sixty than at thirty-three. People say of them then—What a grand old woman! From the extreme dignity of Miss Jollibert's mein, it seemed as if she had always in her mind, as she sailed, with her head high, past the simpering school-girls of Malchester: "Poor, poor things! at thirty-three, people say of me that I am handsome; and at sixty they will call me a grand old woman. What will they say of you?"

There is no doubt whatever that Miss Jollibert was simply admiring the distant landscape; but it seemed to the school-girls that she was repeating this; and they resented it by saying she was cold-looking and passée. Even they, however, never failed to add that Miss Jollibert was a handsome woman.

Malchester was a busy, populous, manufacturing town, and Miss Jollibert's father—an extremely wealthy paint manufacturer—had died mayor of it. So that it was of course incumbent on Miss Jollibert to inhabit a house in one of the most fashionable suburbs; and that the house, like herself, should be handsome and dignified. She kept a great many women-servants, and two indoor men-servants, and a large carriage with a large and very vivid crest: as was only befitting the daughter of so large a paint-manufacturer.

It was really quite a pretty sight to see handsome Miss Jollibert, in her handsome blue silk dress, and seated in her handsome blue barouche, and with her handsome blue-liveried servants and

handsome blue-grey horses, drive forth under the shadow of her azure parasol upon a smiling summer's day. She generally looked straight before her, between the horses' heads ; *she* didn't turn aside to recognise everybody. She had a little way of drawing herself up and sighing "*Hum*," like a genuine bee, which was enough to make the most impertinent heart quail. Nevertheless when Miss Jollibert liked, she could smile out of her deep brown eyes to this side and to that too, not a little sweetly. It was a marvel to all the world why she persisted in remaining Miss Jollibert. When the weather was rainy, the open barouche was substituted by a dark red carriage, with scarlet wheels. When it snowed again, she spun away over the sparkling surface, her sleigh, a heterogeneous but artistic confusion of seal-skin, sable tail and ermine, herself a study in peacock-blue.

When it snowed. It was snowing very hard one winter's night that Miss Jollibert sat alone before her drawing-room fire. It was a magnificent fire, and the drawing-room was simply a blaze of magnificence, and Miss Jollibert was indeed magnificent in diamonds and a rose-coloured velvet dress—so bright that it made her perhaps too brilliant complexion look quite pale in comparison ; as probably she knew. Everything, from the superb Eastern knick-knacks in the brackets, to the hot-house flowers on the tables, spoke of wealth. You looked at all parts of the room, and you said—What expenditure ! Then you looked at Miss Jollibert herself, and repeated—What expenditure more emphatically than before. And if you were a sensitive person of quick thought, you added to yourself : "How would a poor man feel in this room ?"

Miss Jollibert, at all events, appeared to feel very comfortable. Her diamonds flashed in the firelight, as she lay back in a luxurious arm-chair, and toyed with the folds of her rose-coloured velvet. The people of Malchester said it was ridiculous Miss Jollibert should dress herself up in a rose-colour velvet and diamonds when she was alone, for the simple pleasure of seeing the fire-light flash on them. Miss Jollibert, however, cared little what anyone said, and at all events she was looking superbly handsome.

A clock on the mantel-piece struck the hour of eight ; and a minute after, eight tolled forth from a neighbouring steeple, and was borne to Miss Jollibert's window with a gust of drifting snow. She shivered at the sound of the snow, leaned forward and poked the fire ; then turned and settled the various pieces of the little tea-service on the low table beside her. She went over them all. A creampot, a slop-bowl, a sugar-basin, and two tea-cups. She examined the two tea-cups particularly ; little priceless trinkets they were. She put them down, and examined her own beautiful hands—they *were* beautiful hands. Then she removed the little toast-rack on the table down to the fire ; after which she fell into a profound reverie until a quarter past eight, when she roused herself once more, and rang the bell.

An instant after a servant, dressed in black, appeared at the door.

"James," asked she, in a perculiarly musical contralto voice, "did you deliver my note to the Bishop?—You did?—And waited for the answer?—What was the exact message given to you?"

"His lordship sent his compliments, if you please 'm, and he would be happy to be at Miss Jollibert's by five minutes to eight precisely."

"*Hum*," sighed Miss Jollibert.

Just as Miss Jollibert sighed *Hum*, a tall man, some years turned forty, was stamping his feet free from snow downstairs in the hall. Seen by the flickering lamp-light, he looked a very pale and rather gaunt student; but when he passed on up into the brilliancy of the staircase, his clear-cut features lost their gauntness; and one noted the striking intellect of his large white brow, and the limpid beauty of his rather dreamy eyes. When the door opened, he smiled straight over at the rose-coloured velvet figure, and advanced, holding out his hand and saying very sweetly:

"I'm sorry I'm late, Miss Jollibert."

She did not speak until she had poured tea into the two tea-cups, and seated herself with her own in the arm-chair which she had before occupied.

"I daresay you were rather surprised when you had my note this afternoon, Bishop?"

He stirred his tea slowly, looking at her, and smiling again.

"I was curious to know what could be the important matter that was troubling Miss Jollibert's mind; and I was glad, very glad, to think perhaps I was going to be of some use to my old friend, Miss Jollibert."

She played with her diamond rings a little nervously, and turning her head looked into the fire.

"An old friend; yes, so you are. You seem to have been an old friend all my life. I cannot remember the time when I did not know you. I know that other people call me foolish and vain behind my back, and somehow or other, I know that you never do. Would you rather that I told you now what is upon my mind—or would you rather wait a little?"

Stretching up he settled the little tea-cup carefully amongst the Sèvres china on the mantel-piece; and crossing his legs, folded his white hands composedly on his apron.

"I should wish you to tell me all about it at once, Marion. Why delay anything you may have to say?"

She hesitated an instant longer, the firelight playing round her heavy eyelashes. "The long and the short of the thing is this," she said; "or rather this is what might be called the short of it, and the long will come after. I have made up my mind to go over to Rome."

The Bishop uncrossed his legs with a sudden movement, and stared at Miss Jollibert. After an instant's pause, he raised himself once more, and brought his teacup carefully down from the mantelpiece again. "My dear," said he, "could I trouble you for just a *leetle* more sugar; just the *le—east* thing. Thank you, thank you. Ah!"

The *Ah* was more in the way of a sigh than an interjection; and with it he half closed one eye, and minutely inspected with the other the morsel of currant bun he was engaged in eating. There was something in the action which appeared to irritate Miss Jollibert slightly, for she pushed her chair back from the fire, and asked him very quickly: "Did your lordship not hear me?"

He finished the currant bun, and folded his hands composedly again.

"So," repeated he, "you have quite made up your mind to go over to Rome?"

"Quite," said Miss Jollibert; and after an instant's pause, unbroken except for the crackling of the flames, she added "*Quite*," again.

"Why?" asked the Bishop, quickly.

"On account of my convictions," replied Miss Jollibert, still more quickly.

"Ah!" sighed the Bishop once more. His lordship passed his hand slowly all over his heavy masses of flaxen hair. Miss Jollibert fastened her large brown eyes upon him rather mournfully, and after a minute, began to talk.

"Of course it has taken me a long time to make up my mind about this; and, of course, I am very sorry. I have studied Butler, and Jeremy Taylor, and Luther's treatises, and Manning, and Newman. I have fought against my convictions as I never fought against anything before; and yet, in spite of myself as it were, I have been converted. Of course I am very sorry that it should be so. In a case like this, however, I think that one is not, perhaps, entirely responsible for one's own conversion."

The Bishop inspected the side of his handsome foot, and settling himself yet a little more comfortably, nodded with much benevolence. "Quite so, quite so; very possibly not, my dear."

Miss Jollibert flushed slightly.

"No," she resumed, with some warmth. "Why of course you must know yourself, Bishop, that most ancient theologians, and *all* prophets, foretold the foundation of one permanent and Apostolic Church. I don't suppose that even the Bishop of Malchester would care to assert that Church to be the Church of England."

Henry Hammersley, Bishop of Malchester, took a long sip of his tea, and turning his limpid blue eyes round upon Miss Jollibert, smiled. "My dear," said he, gently, "I always feel very diffident about making any assertions."

"Well—but I don't," pursued she, with a slight tremor in her

voice. "Just think what it is for me to be convinced, firmly convinced, in my mind, of there being no English Church, no English Rites, no English Orders to be relied upon."

"O—h!" said he, wheeling sharp round, and snatching another little bit of currant bun from the plate. "So I'm not a bishop?"

"No," cried Miss Jollibert, half angrily and half in laughter; "at least, I don't think so. I am very sorry, but I can't make up my mind that you are. I am very sorry to say such things. Don't be angry with me, Bishop."

He stretched his hand out for the little poker, and gave a sharp tap to a bit of coal which sent it rattling noisily down upon the painted tiles. "I beg your pardon, my dear," said he, ruefully. "I ought never to have meddled with the fire, you see—just as you ought never to have meddled with the theologians. Hand me the tongs, Marion."

She did as he asked her, a rush of tears coming into her dark eyes. "It is of no use to talk to me in that way; no use saying anything, since I have quite made up my mind. And besides that," she added, after a slight pause, with her eyes fixed anxiously upon the back of the Bishop's fair head, just then within dangerous proximity of the grate: "I have quite made up my mind that I'm going to dispose of my house, and my horses, and my furniture, and everything; and immediately after I have collected the money, I shall go into a convent, and take the veil."

He put the tongs carefully down on the fender; and sticking two of his long white fingers into Miss Jollibert's sugar-basin, brought out a little pointed lump, and balanced it dreamily in the air.

"Ah," sighed he again.

Miss Jollibert pushed her chair back abruptly, and stood before him. "Why do you only answer *ah*, like that? I asked you here to help me, because you always used to help me with things; and now you only answer *ah*." Then turning suddenly away, she crossed both hands upon the mantelpiece, and leaned her head down upon them. "Oh, don't you see what it is? Don't you understand? What is the use of a carriage, and horses, and furniture, and wealth like mine? What is the use of life? I want to *do* something. I want to live."

The Bishop rose. He drew one of her hands gently from her face, and closed his own over it. "I understand," he said huskily, and looked straight into the fire.

The snow rattled against the window, and the wind howled around the corner of the square. He leaned one elbow on the gold-coloured plush, and rested his fair head on it. He was a very young man, this, to be a bishop. There was scarcely a silver thread mingled with the glistening masses. Miss Jollibert, too, as she stood in the firelight, looked the perfection of a well-built, handsome-featured woman. It would have seemed as if the weight of her hand oppressed the Bishop,

for he breathed very hard as he stood there holding it, Miss Jollibert's moist eyes staring pensively the while into the distant half-gloom of the ante-chamber.

After a long pause some thought appeared suddenly to strike him, for with an abrupt movement he drew his hand away; and walking across to the other side of the fire, ostentatiously put up his double eye-glass to examine a little Alma Tadema upon the opposite wall.

"Don't confuse your convictions with your inclinations," he began. "(Your father had that picture in a much better light than you have, Marion.)—As you say, *do* something, but don't let your inclination to *do* something interfere with your convictions.—(If you were to shorten the string it might be better.)—Why not become a doctor?"

"A doctor!" ejaculated she, dazedly.

"Y-es," he continued, working with the string of the picture in an abstracted fashion. "Or a lawyer; there would be a great path of usefulness open to you. I *have* heard of lady solicitors—and you might step into your uncle Matthew's practice. I daresay there will be lady barristers and lady ministers by-and-by. Why, my dear, you might even become a bishop!—In Tadema's pictures detail, and detail alone ——"

"Bishop," interrupted Miss Jollibert in a preternaturally calm tone: "my convictions interfere in no way with my desire to *do* something. My convictions are, of course, the result of conversion."

"Who converted you?" enquired he, still with his back to her, and passing rapidly to another picture. "Was it the ancient theologians or the prophets? Well, Marion, you have asked my advice. Shall I tell you, then, what I think you ought to do with your life? I shall soon be growing an old man, and I *am* a very old friend, so I may be privileged to say what I choose. I think you ought to marry."

She answered nothing for a moment; then, moving slowly beside him, began to converse about the pictures and their various merits and demerits, in an easy, conversational manner which was surprising in itself, considering the suppressed emotion of her voice hardly a minute ago. The Bishop turned quickly round, and, closing his eye-glass with a sharp click, stood looking at her. Just as she was beginning to enlarge upon the beauties of a certain Holy Family she had seen at St. Petersburg, he walked straight back to the mantel-piece, and leaning his face on his hand again, interrupted her without ceremony.

"Marion," he said, gravely, "I thought you wanted me to help you."

Her eyes lit up, and she answered quickly with all the emotion in her voice again. "Yes, and when I ask you to do so, when I tell you seriously that I have made up my mind to go into a convent and take the veil, you reply by treating the whole thing as a joke, and advising me—to marry! This is not what I expected from you."

He stood beside her in a moment, his whole manner changing. "I never supposed that it was," he said. "I never supposed that

it was what you expected. Nevertheless, Marion, it is my advice, and I repeat it to you. I think you ought to marry."

She looked at him for a minute longer, her expression varying betwixt surprise and impatience. "What do you mean?" she asked. "*I* repeat that you are treating the whole thing as a joke; and that I think that it is very unkind of you to do so. *Marry!* that is a proof in itself that you are laughing at me. Marry whom?"

Turning swiftly away he took a rapid turn up and down the room; then halting beside the tea-table, began to finger nervously with the dainty tea-service.

"I'm sure I don't know how to say it to you," he hesitated almost tearfully. "I know so well that you have never suspected anything; and I have been so much afraid of startling you; and I have been so ridiculous. But if I might dare, that is—if you would allow me—— Marion," he cried, with a sudden movement of his arm, which upset the sugar-basin, and sent a shower of knots pattering over the floor, "I would say—"*Marry me.*"

As for the people of Malchester, they declared they couldn't have believed it, either of Miss Jollibert or the Bishop. Half of them said *especially* of Miss Jollibert; and the other half *particularly* of the Bishop. There were no very definite rumours afloat until one evening when the Bishop went out to dine with a friend, and after dinner told a little humorous story, in his own humorous way.

Two days later there were upwards of ninety distinct reports of this story, the least wild of which was, that the Bishop had tried to persuade Miss Jollibert to imprison herself in a convent, but that she had replied "No, she would sooner marry him than that; and so, from one thing to another, they were to be married. As to the hitch in this version: namely, why in the name of wonder the Bishop could want Miss Jollibert to imprison herself in a convent: a lady of the Baptist persuasion soon filled that up. She discovered that the Bishop and Miss Jollibert were in the habit of playing cards together of an evening—*playing cards;*—Bézique, or some such game: that was to say, of course, equivalent to *gambling.* So by the end of the week it was widely current throughout Malchester, that the Bishop was encumbered with heavy gambling debts, which were about to be liquidated by Miss Jollibert.

At the very height of all this, the Bishop's fair head, and shiny black coat, appeared for the first time in the blue barouche, vis-à-vis to Miss Jollibert. It was a sunshiny day, and the Bishop was noticed to be laughing. It very often requires only a straw, or a pin-point, to change insanity to sanity, unpopularity to popularity, ferocity to mildness. In this case the Bishop's laugh was the symbolical pin-point. Next morning the heavy clouds of suspicion had rolled away, and the blue sky shone again. Next morning all Malchester was laughing and smiling with the Bishop.

There was one great mercy, and Miss Jollibert remarked it herself. Putting the fiction of gambling, and other ridiculous debts aside, no-one could say she was being married for her money. The Bishop's purple brougham was fully a match for Miss Jollibert's barouche; and his high-stepping bays would have kept pace any day with the blue-grey horses. The palace stood in an unfashionable end of the town it is true; but it was a grand old brown building with long terraced gardens, sloping away down to the river; aged trees, and huge clusters of scarlet geranium, turning them in summer into a paradise.

Sometimes Miss Jollibert would go out to drive with the Bishop and the Bishop's sister, Miss Hammersley, a tiny, silver-haired lady; and on such evenings the curious passers-by on the river would catch a glimpse of rose-coloured velvet, and a black-coat here; and a glimmer of grey satin, and silver hair, and knitting-pins up there under the portico. On such evenings Miss Jollibert was very happy.

Once or twice before the wedding, there were grand entertainments. Other and older Bishops, grave Deans, ambitious Canons, and many other mighty men paced two and two amidst the singing of the birds, and the red sunsets, and the distant sound of splashing oars on the river. Miss Jollibert had great waves of trouble—doubts as to her convictions and conversions—sweep over her then; and she half regretted her grand sacrifice, and her quiet convent. And when such phrases as "The Ancient Traditions of the Church;" as "The legitimacy of the Apostolic Succession," came upon her unawares round the drooping laburnum, she was often upon the point of declaring boldly and outright, that they had nothing to do with the Ancient Traditions, or the Apostolic Succession. But she managed to content herself with sighing—*Hum;* and with relieving her mind on the matter as soon as she found herself alone with her own Bishop. He invariably laughed very much, and said: "I wish—I wish you had told them your thought:" and then sighed a long *a-h;* his dreamy blue eyes looking steadfastly up into the blue darkening heavens. He looked so well like that, with the rising moonlight playing about his pale brow, that poor human Miss Jollibert felt her convictions quivering and wavering, in a way which she might have laid hold of as a possible argument in itself against a fallible rule, if she had only known it. But she simply put her white hand upon the Bishop's arm and whispered:

"Of course you know best."

So time passed on. Just as early summer was changing into late summer, a great illness broke out over the country. It was exactly at this time that the Bishop and Miss Jollibert had intended to be joined; but they put off the ceremony for a time, and clasping hands figuratively—since duty forbade them to do so in reality—they set boldly to work. So all through the long, hot days, and very often far into the stifling nights, the blue barouche and the purple brougham rolled about Malchester.

Sometimes it would happen that the two crossed each other at the turn of a street, at the corner of a square, and the Bishop would lift his hat, calling out laughingly: "How do you do, Marion? Ninety degrees in the shade, to-day." And she would nod back, with a smile: "Quite well, thank you, Bishop.—I wonder what it is in the sunshine?"

After the illness was in a great measure abated; just as the hazy cornfields were beginning to turn to gold; just then, Miss Jollibert awoke one morning to find a great peace at her heart, and that her convictions had for ever fallen asleep. Strangely enough it was the morning of her wedding day.

At Miss Jollibert's wedding, there was not one being who had the heart, or the audacity, to say she was anything but a very handsome woman; and that the Bishop and she were a very lucky pair. Most of them added *particularly* the Bishop; but if some of them did say instead *especially* Miss Jollibert, it was not to be supposed that a slight was intended upon Miss Jollibert in any way. The very first flakes of snow that came down that winter, fell fair upon the Lord Bishop of Malchester and Mrs. Hammersley.

WHY?

Robin courted Nancy:—
People wondered why;
What was there to fancy
In her languid eye?
Robin, looking deeper;
Saw a well of peace;
Thought it well to keep her,
Granting no release.

She had auburn tresses:—
People called them red;
Wondered why caresses
Came to such a head!
Robin saw their splendour;
Said, till she grew old,
Nature meant to lend her
Some abiding gold.

She was lithe of figure:—
People called it thin;
Stouter maids and bigger
Tried to draw theirs in.
Robin said a supple
Form was his delight;
Every loving couple
Think each other right.

She was always busy,
Morning, noon and night;
"What a meddling missy;
People cried, for spite.
Robin said his labours
Ceased, when she was nigh;
Yet his friends and neighbours
Never *could* tell why.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

"ONLY one day more," soliloquised the Baron de Croix-Martel, as he put the finishing stroke to his toilette, and contemplated his well-waxed iron-grey moustache with less satisfaction than he would probably have felt had not his mind been otherwise preoccupied.

"One short December day," he went on after a pause, "and every likely place already explored twice over except the quay. I wonder who the idiot was who first invented new year's gifts! Not one of *my* ancestors, I'll engage. The Croix-Martels date from the Crusades, and I daresay have been guilty of follies enough since then; but I won't do them the injustice of supposing that they ever threw away more money than they could possibly help."

With this comforting reflection the Baron took up his hat, gloves, and cane, and sallied forth from his little apartment in the Rue Godot on the errand for which he was bound.

The personage destined to play the part of hero in our sketch, of whose character some idea may have been formed from the above monologue, was a fair average specimen of a not uncommon class of individuals. In other words, he was one of those men whose main object in life is to procure for themselves the greatest amount of enjoyment at the lowest practicable cost. His family, as correctly stated by himself, was of unimpeachable antiquity, and, up to the Revolution, had been possessors, from father to son, of a tolerably extensive domain in Normandy, the whole of which, including the château, had passed, since 1793, into other hands.

By way of recompense for past services—though in what they consisted, except in escaping the guillotine by a timely retreat to Switzerland, no one ever knew—the present Baron's father had managed, on the restoration of the Bourbons, to obtain, by dint of incessant solicitations, a share of the indemnity accorded to the impoverished royalists. On the interest of this sum, amounting to about ten thousand francs a year, his son contrived to live, if not luxuriously, at least—his economical principles taken into account—comfortably enough.

Our hero was a bachelor, not so much from choice as from his inability hitherto to discover what he considered a suitable parti. Tall, thin, and just turned fifty, he was sufficiently good-tempered when nothing occurred to put him out of humour, and as notorious a miser as ever existed since the days of Harpagon and John Elwes. Without going so far as some of his particular friends, who affirmed him to be the original of Gavarni's famous type, the gentleman

" qui coupait les liards en quatre," it may safely be said that whenever he could indulge in his favourite weakness without compromising himself, he invariably did so, and adhered strictly to the time-honoured maxim of taking care of the pence, and letting the pounds take care of themselves.

But, perhaps, of all the disagreeable necessities to which he was periodically compelled to submit, the most obnoxious to his feelings was the obligation of complying with the (to him) utterly inexplicable custom of celebrating the advent of New Year's Day by a distribution of étrennes; a drain on his purse which, although he took care to confine his liberality within the narrowest limits was even in its modified form, inexpressibly painful to him.

The twenty-franc piece he felt bound to offer his concierge caused him an annual pang, and the guerdon of two francs to the waiter of the little restaurant where he was in the habit of dining when not invited elsewhere, lay heavy on his conscience, even after appropriating to his own use—which no one but himself ever dreamt of doing—the cigar tied up with pink ribbon, presented to him as a " reminder," and intended by its owner to be offered in turn to every customer in the room.

These, however, were minor grievances compared with what he was suffering on the last day of the year of grace 1874; and only those who knew him could by any possibility understand or appreciate his mental perplexity on the morning of his introduction to the reader.

In the course of the preceding six months, he had made the acquaintance of the Comtesse de Franchimont, a Belgian widow lady with two daughters, who had recently settled in Paris, and was, according to report, in possession of a handsome fortune. Naturally partial to society, when it cost him nothing, he had by degrees become an habitual frequenter of her pretty apartment in the Rue de Marignan, and had established himself there, to a certain extent, as l'ami de la maison.

Whether he entertained any ulterior views respecting either mother or daughters, we are not in a position to state; if he did, he kept his own counsel, and all that can be hinted on the subject is that he might have done worse.

Madame de Franchimont was barely forty, and did not look her age; as for Mdlle. Berthe, the brune, and Mdlle. Louise, the blonde, they were both charming, and perfectly aware of the fact. In this pleasant circle the Baron soon made himself entirely at home. When he did not dine there: and we may be sure that he never refused an invitation unless he had a better one in prospect: he generally dropped in of an evening, or occupied a spare seat in their box at the opera.

This continued intimacy, with its many contingent advantages, he had hitherto enjoyed without scruple; but the time was at hand when,

in accordance with Parisian usages, the hospitalities he had received must be adequately returned; New Year's Day was approaching with rapid strides, and his offering on the occasion must, as he dolefully acknowledged, be proportionately liberal.

For days and weeks he had wandered from place to place, like a perturbed spirit, in quest of some object suitable for his purpose; he had dived into obscure passages, and emerged at the other end with the disheartening consciousness of failure, and had pored over the stock of half the curiosity shops in the capital without unearthing a single pearl of price within the limits of his own. Bonbons were, of course, out of the question, even if the tariff of Messrs. Boissier and Gouache permitted such an investment of his money; and, as for jewellery, the bare idea made him shudder.

In short, the worthy Baron was at his wits' end, and, as a last resource, resolved to explore the refuge of the destitute, the quay, from the Pont Royal to the Pont des Arts, whither we may as well follow him.

He had already exhausted the Quai Voltaire and the Quai Malaquais, and was on the point of retracing his steps, when the recollection of an old bric-à-brac establishment in the adjoining Rue de Seine struck him as a hitherto uninspected locality. Taking, therefore, the turn opposite the Mazarin Library, he speedily discovered on his right hand the object of his search, and entered the shop. A few minutes' examination and a question or two sufficed to convince him that his unlucky star was still in the ascendant, and he was about to resume his walk when some broken pieces of china lying in a corner caught his eye.

"What is that?" he asked the dealer.

"Ah, monsieur, ne m'en parlez pas!" exclaimed the individual addressed, in a disconsolate tone which seemed to forbid further allusion to the painful subject.

"But what is it?" persisted the Baron.

"What it is now, you see, Monsieur le Baron, but what it was before my shopman let it fall and smashed it to bits, you can have no idea. I never saw a finer vase; real old Dresden, worth a couple of thousand francs if it was worth a sou. They say it once belonged to Madame Dubarry."

"Ah!" said the Baron, looking attentively at the heap of fragments, and poking at them with his cane. "Cannot it be repaired?"

"Impossible, monsieur," replied the other. "The cleverest workman in France could make nothing of it now."

"Have you tried?" asked the Baron.

"Of what use, monsieur? Who would buy a vase dissected like a map of France?"

"What are you going to do with the pieces?" inquired M. de Croix-Martel, in whose fertile brain a "happy thought" was gradually germinating.

"What can I do but throw them away?" growled the irate tradesman. "They are fit for nothing else. Even a chiffonnier would hardly pick them up."

"Will you sell them to me for five francs?"

The dealer's eye glistened.

"Certainly, monsieur, if you desire it. But what possible use ——"

"Never mind," interrupted the Baron, "that's my affair. Now listen; what I want you to do is this. You will pack up these pieces, just as they are, mind, put this card of mine with them, and send the parcel this evening from nine to half past to Madame la Comtesse de Franchimont, 64, Rue de Marignan. It is not to be taken upstairs, but left with the concierge. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur le Baron," answered the owner of the bric-à-brac shop, glancing at the card as he spoke; "all shall be done exactly as you wish."

"I can quite depend upon you?"

"Quite, Monsieur le Baron. At nine-thirty to the moment it shall be delivered."

"Enfin!" said M. de Croix-Martel to himself, as he walked briskly homewards, "a most brilliant inspiration, ma parole! For five francs I shall have the credit of a present worthy of a millionaire. The fellow who brings it will naturally be supposed to have let it drop on the way—the Champs Elysées are always slippery in frosty weather—and to have bolted in order to avoid unpleasant inquiries. When the parcel arrives, I shall be there, and as no one knows where I bought it, I can storm away at my ease without fear of discovery. Glorious piece of luck! I've a good mind to treat myself to half a bottle of Beaune at dinner on the strength of it. And so I will, parbleu!"

And so he did.

Punctually at five minutes before nine, fortified by the generous stimulant alluded to, and in the highest possible spirits, the Baron rang the first floor bell at No. 64, Rue de Marignan, and was immediately ushered into the drawing-room, where the three ladies were assembled. Madame de Franchimont, seated by the fire, was occupied with some intricate marvel of embroidery, while her daughters were busily employed in arranging on a table in the centre of the apartment a variety of bonbon boxes and other objects strongly indicative of New Year's Day, which had evidently just arrived.

"Look here M. le Baron," said Berthe as he entered the room; "see what a number of presents we have already received; a lapis lazuli paper cutter, and such a beautiful flower-stand near the window!"

"And a delicious filigree card-case," chimed in Louise, holding up the object in question for the inspection of the visitor.

"Charming, indeed," responded M. de Croix-Martel, looking more admiringly at the speaker than at the card-case.

"There, that will do, girls," interposed her mother, after shaking hands with her guest. "Come and sit by the fire, Baron, and Berthe will give you some tea."

"L'un n'empêche pas l'autre," pertly retorted the young lady, while performing her office of Ganymede; "I am sure the Baron likes pretty things as much as we do. N'est-ce pas, Monsieur?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle, most certainly," he replied; "and I trust that when *my* humble offering arrives, you will be—ahem!—equally indulgent."

"No follies, I hope, Baron," said Madame de Franchimont, shaking her head reprovingly.

"Oh, madame, a mere trifle, I assure you," answered our hero, in a deprecating tone, accompanied, however, by a significant twirl of his moustache. "But you will see—you will see."

At that moment the door opened, and the maître d'hôtel appeared, bearing a voluminous parcel, which he solemnly placed on the table, and, with the explanatory announcement, "Pour Madame la Comtesse," withdrew as noiselessly as he had entered.

"I wonder what it is," cried Berthe. "Give me your scissors, Louise."

"Who can it be from?" said her sister.

"What a strangely-shaped parcel!" remarked Madame de Franchimont, rising from her chair, and approaching the table; while the Baron, laying down his cup, was preparing himself for an outburst of indignation, or, in other words, was "getting the steam up."

"Ah, here is a card," exclaimed Mdlle. Berthe, as she hastily tore away the last obstacle, to the gratification of her curiosity. "Monsieur le Baron! I knew it could be no one else. Mon Dieu! what can this be?"

M. de Croix-Martel, who had quietly drawn near the table, gave one look at the contents of the packet, stood for a moment horror-struck, and then, unperceived by the three ladies, slipped out of the room, and darted down the Rue de Marignan as fast as his legs could carry him. He had seen enough.

Alas! for the vanity of human calculations. The dealer of the Rue de Seine had exceeded his instructions, and had carefully enveloped every fragment of the shattered vase in a separate piece of paper!

CHARLES HERVEY.

JAMES WILDING'S SUMMONS.

"WHAT? Tell you a story of my life at the Diggings? Well, I don't know that I remember any stories, and if I did, they'd be rather rough ones."

"Oh, never mind their being rough, Bertie; it would make them sound all the better."

"Would it indeed, Miss Kate! I recollect something that happened to me—at least, under my own eyes—before I got as far as the Diggings. You might like that, particularly if you have belief in the supernatural. It is undeniably true, and it is quite appropriate to the day; this day, I mean, when we are now sitting together."

"Oh, tell it: do tell it, Bertie."

It was New Year's Day. I and Kate, brother and sister, and fixtures in the old home, had welcomed the wanderer, Robert, only two days before, after his long rovings. It seemed that we could not make enough of him, or that Kate would ever cease plying him with questions. We two brothers were older by several years than she was. All the uncles and the cousins and the aunts were coming to dinner in the evening; but this was only afternoon, and we had gathered round the blazing fire in the dark January day, after the luncheon tray was removed.

"Please tell it, Bertie! What are you waiting for?"

So Bertie began his tale.

"I was for some time in the pine forests of Maine, if you remember, sharing in the pleasures and pains, the good and bad luck of a clearing surveyor's camp. One afternoon, it was the last day of the year, when the labour of the day was over, darkness came swiftly down upon us, surrounded as we were with towering mountains and mighty trees. The fires were lighted, and we sat beneath the overhanging roof of the rude hut which formed the nucleus of the camp. In front of us, the great fire of hemlock logs and branches roared and blazed and crackled, as its huge tongues of flame leapt upward toward the leaden sky, and made the darkness of the forest seem yet more awful and impenetrable. The ruddy light that shone upon our faces as we sat motionless illuminated another and more active group close at hand, three or four who were preparing the game which had been shot for supper. In front ——"

"A dull, dark afternoon, just such another as this one; and you were sitting round the fire as we are," interrupted Kate, who could never be silent very long together.

"Oh, very much like this," answered Bertie, with a queer smile. After which he went on with his narrative. "In front of and below us

lay the river, its swift current chained by the ice, and its white surface stretching far out until it was lost in the gloom beyond. No sound came to break the stillness of that vast solitude, save our own voices, the sighing of the wind overhead among the pine cones, which announced that a storm was getting up, the intermittent howl of the wolf, and now and then the shrill cry of some distant loon."

"Wolves!" cried Kate in a whisper. "I should not have liked that. Why do you stop, Bertie?"

"My chief friend in the camp, nay, my only one, was James Wilding. He had come from the old country, no mistaking that, or that he was an educated man and a gentleman. Often I wondered what brought him out in a place so little suited to his refinement; but he volunteered no information, and I did not like to ask questions. Another Englishman there was called Gregory; the rest were of various breeds, chiefly Yankees. That Gregory had been a servant to Wilding, and, indeed, was so still in a degree, we knew; but in the camp all ranked pretty well as equals. Gregory was a hearty, honest man, much attached to his master."

"Was he good looking?" demanded Kate.

"Who?" asked Bertie, when he and I had had our laugh out. "Gregory?"

"No, no; James Wilding."

"Very good looking indeed, sister mine. Fit for a hero of romance. Am I to go on?"

"Why, you know you are."

"Yes, Wilding was good looking; even you young ladies would have thought him so; but he was worn and sad and wasted. The man had some great care upon him; I had always seen that. Sometimes I would catch Gregory's eyes fixed upon him with a strange yearning. This afternoon of which I am speaking Wilding seemed quite buried in gloom, scarcely replied to remarks, and hardly ate any supper when we sat round to it. For a man, sharing a camp life out in those wild and desolate regions, to be off his food to the extent of refusing supper is a remarkable fact."

"I daresay it was not well cooked," said Kate. "You should have had me there; I'd have made him an omelet."

"Without eggs, my dear?"

"Didn't you get any eggs? Goodness gracious! Go on, Bertie."

"Supper was half through, the rest of us eating like wolves, when I spoke to him. 'What's amiss, Wilding, this evening? You seem to have a fit of the blues upon you.'

"Wilding did not answer me for a minute. 'Yes,' he said with hesitation; 'it's true I feel depressed. The fact is, Errington, I—I—was a little disturbed to-day. Met with something which startled me.'

"'What was it?'

"But he did not say. He was leaning his head upon his hand, gazing outward with a troubled look, as if he wanted to see through the dark pine trees. By-and-bye, when we had finished supper and most of them were stretched round the largest fire at a little distance, Gregory came to the tent for something he wanted. His master lifted up his head and spoke to him.

"'Gregory,' said he, 'when I was down at that lower clearing to-day and you were near me, did you hear anybody speak to me?'

"'No, sir,' said Gregory, in a sharp, quick tone.

"'Anyone's voice?' went on Wilding. 'Any voice that—that you knew?'

"I shall never forget the startled look that crossed Gregory's countenance. But he answered carelessly: 'There was nobody's voice near, Mr. Wilding, but yours and mine. The rest of 'em were on the other side of the swamp. I heard nothing at all, sir.'

"'It was just before I fell.'

"'I was quite close to you, sir, when you fell. You first dropped the axe you were holding and then dropped, yourself, right on to the handle. I thought you'd got hurt in some way, but when I came to pick you up I saw it was a faint.'

"'Yes, a faint,' assented Wilding, in a low tone. 'You were close to me, and yet you heard nothing.'

"'Nothing at all out of the way, sir. Just before, there had been a bird screaming in the pines.'

"'It is strange,' murmured Wilding to himself, as the man went away, 'very strange. But I could not have been mistaken.'

"'What did you think you heard, Wilding?' I asked, after a minute or two. 'Any alarming sound?' For my own ideas had flown to the suppressed growl of some beast of prey, which might have tracked our camp, and be tracking *us*.

"'Not alarming,' said Wilding; 'something, on the contrary, very sweet and gentle.'

"'Sweet and gentle?'

"'Ay! sweet and gentle.'

"'And yet you—you fainted at it!' I went on with hesitation, not sure of my ground, and somewhat puzzled.

"'Yes, I fainted at it. I'm not strong, Errington, as you must have observed.'

"'Won't you explain the mystery to me?'

"'You've given it its right name—mystery. A mystery never to be solved in this world.'

"He spoke so dreamingly, in so weird a tone, gazing the while at the sky above us, now black with the shades of night, that I held my peace.

"'Perhaps I had better tell you the whole story, Errington,' he said, after a long pause. 'I should like to tell someone before I die; and there's no one but you I could tell it to—you, or Gregory.

Failing you, it must have been him; he knows something of it already.'

"'Tell away, Wilding; I shall like to hear it: but don't talk about dying.'

"'No,' said he, 'the fact will be sufficient, without talking of it.'

"'Now, what do you mean by that?'

"'Simply that I have this day, as I believe, received my death-summons.'

"'Look here, old man,' I said, as a creepy feeling stole over me, 'we have plenty of troubles and difficulties to fight against out here; don't let us add superstitious fears and fancies to them.'

"'Listen,' said he, beginning his narrative without further comment. 'I was just four-and-twenty years of age when I came out from the old country to America, to—yes, I suppose I may say it—seek my fortune. I had property which brought me in four hundred a-year; but to a young fellow who had expected that his patrimony when he came into it would have been five or six times as much, and who has, moreover, been brought up in accordance with the expectation, it seems a very small income. How unjustifiably extravagant my father had been we knew nothing of until he died; and we three sons—I was only the third of them—resolved to pay up liabilities, and save our good name. I came to America with my share; all that remained to me; indulging in golden hopes. Gregory, the son of our gamekeeper, asked to come with me as my servant; he wanted to see new places. I told him he might come and welcome, but not as my servant; I was not rich enough to keep one. We came together; I paid his expenses, and he persisted in acting as my servant. All the way on board ship we kept calling this country, he and I, the Land of Golden Hopes,' added Wilding in a different tone, breaking off to laugh a little.

"'And did it prove so?' I asked.

"'Yes—in a sense. My golden hopes were realised in the shape of *love*. Love, Robert Errington.'

"'I see.'

"'Never was there a sweeter woman in this world than Mary Offrey. She was a native of Boston, well reared, refined and gentle. Of money she possessed about as much as I, and our love was mutual. We married, and were happy. It is a great thing to be able to say that in this world.'

"'True for you, Wilding.'

"'Mary's money was invested in one of the most prosperous banks of the United States. It brought in a high rate of interest, and I withdrew mine from the Funds at home to place it in the same El Dorado. We had a lovely house just outside Boston, and lived in good style. Gregory was still my servant, for he had never left me.'

"'Any children?'

"'One. A girl. A little fairy beauty. Jane we named her, after

my wife's mother and my mother at home, for they both chanced to bear the same name. Janey was, I'm afraid, our idol. She was sweet in temper as she was lovely in form; her hair was golden, her blue eyes had heaven's light in them. All a fond father's ravings you will call this, Errington, so we'll let it pass. Seven years went on; seven years of peace and wonderful happiness; and if one little cloud of thought would now and again come to mar it, I drove it away again. It was on the score of my wife's health. She looked at times suspiciously delicate, and one croaking old doctor—I called him that—had whispered a caution that her heart was not strong. Janey grew to be a bright, intelligent girl, her manners sweetly simple, her disposition loving—I can't help repeating this, Errington: servants and all were utterly devoted to her; and Gregory would, I believe, have given his life for her. Nevertheless, simple though in ordinary she was, the child had strange ways about her, which I failed to understand. She would talk to herself in a singular manner, and tell us of queer things that she had dreamed. They were such dreams as, I verily believe, never disturbed the rest of any child before. Her mother laughed at them, yet was doubtful. "What can possibly be the meaning of it, James?" she once said to me. "Oh!" I answered gaily, laughing too, "the child must have come direct from the fairies." One day, it was the last day of the old year——Are you following me, my friend?'

"'Indeed I am.'

"'It was the last day of the old year, just as this day is the last of the year now passing from us,' continued Wilding. 'Janey had been born on New Year's Day, and some children were to come the next evening to keep her birthday; she would be seven years old. After tea she began talking of the morrow's party, skipping gaily about, with happy chatter. Presently she seemed to tire, sat down on a footstool and became silent. Suddenly she turned round and looked at me. Her mother had left her seat to search in a cabinet at the end of the room, and was standing with her back to us.

"'Papa, why did you say we should be twelve to-morrow evening?'

"'Why, so we shall be, Janey.'

"'No,' said she, shaking her little head; 'it's only eleven; I've been counting.'

"'There are to be nine little guests, you know, my dear: yourself will make ten, and your mamma and I twelve.'

"'But mamma will not be here.'

"'You quaint little reasoner! Where else will mamma be?'

"'I spoke in a jesting tone; Janey was looking at me almost doubtingly, as if she did not understand my last question; her blue eyes, a world of serious depth in them, were fixed upon mine.

"'Not mamma,' she repeated; 'she won't be here. So it will be eleven; you count, papa.'

"'I laughed, and let her have her way. Mary came back with what she had been getting from the cabinet—it was a picture album, I remember—and I don't think she had heard Janey's logic. Robert Errington! before midday the next day she was dead.'

"'Who was?' I cried, startled. 'The child?'

"'No, no; Mary, my dear wife. She had an hour's illness in the morning, and then died,' he added in a tremulous whisper.

"'Good heavens! What was it?'

"'That croaker, the old doctor, had the cruelty to say we ought to have been looking out for it; that he had warned me,' rejoined Wilding, in a voice so low I could hardly catch it. 'It seemed like cruelty to me; I suppose he did not mean it so. She took with her the best part of my life; all that was worth having in it, except Janey.'

"For a few minutes there was a silence, dense as that amid the pine-trees when the wind is still. Then Wilding went on.

"'Telling all this in words, though it's rarely absent from my thoughts, is so painful to me that I must end it. Listen yet:

"'Another birthday of Janey's came round; or, rather, was coming, when she would be ten years old: three years had elapsed since that dreadful time. There's not much to record of their passing; the world was half a blank to me, leaving little remembrance behind it. The last day of the old year, in the morning, Janey was with me in the study at her lessons. It was a fair, sunny day, and when the last lesson book was closed, I began talking brightly of the little treat I had planned for the morrow—for I did not inflict my gloom upon the child. We were to take a short journey of pleasure, and I painted to her in glowing colours the features of the trip, saying in this place we should see some magnificent scenery, and in that place we should dine—a sumptuous dinner, with jam tarts and sweetmeats. Another little girl was to go with us. Janey, sitting close to me, had bent from her chair sideways to lay her head upon my arm while she listened, her pretty, golden curls falling over it. "And we three," I wound up with, "Lotty and Janey and I, will be happier than all the fairies."'

"'But, papa,' she suddenly said, lifting her head to face me, 'I shall not be there.'

"'A cold shiver passed through me. Just the words she had said of her mother three years before.

"'What do you mean, my child?'

"'Why, papa, I shall not be with you on that New Year's journey. It will be only you and Lotty.'

"'Janey, why do you say this? Who told you you would not?'

"'Mamma,' she promptly answered. 'Mamma came to my room in the night, and said I was going to be with her to-morrow. She woke me up, I think, for I opened my eyes all in a minute, and she was standing by the bed, and then she said it.'

"'The child repeated this as calmly as she would repeat a story out of a book, without the slightest appearance of discomfort. A

wild terror filled my heart; I could not control it, and I caught her to me and stroked her golden hair.

"'Janey—Janey! Don't you know what you are saying? If you go to be with your mother, you would leave me all alone. All alone!'

"'Janey burst into sobs. But yet she did not seem to realise the situation. I swallowed my own emotion; I soothed her with loving words—which brought to my soul none of the comfort they were meant to bring to hers. Alas, alas!'

"'And the result?' I breathed, hardly daring to put the question.

"'*Need* you ask it?" returned Wilding, with a bitter smile. 'That same morning, close upon the conversation in the study, Janey was seized with a dangerous disorder which was going about Boston, and died the next day—her birthday.'

"'I'm going to mamma in the strange land,' she strove to say to me in dying. 'I know she will be there to meet me. Don't cry, papa.—Yes, yes, mamma, I'm coming,' she added a minute afterwards, striving to rise from the pillow and stretching out her hands apparently to somebody in the distance, and then fell back lifeless upon the pillow."

"Wilding bent his face on his hands, tears trickling through his fingers. Thus there was a long silence.

"'And that's my past story, Errington,' he said, looking up.

"'How long is it since?'

"'Two years ago Janey left me. I've not much to tell of them. The wealthy bank broke, and swallowed up all my money and Mary's in its ruins. But that I had inherited a slender income from my Uncle James, in England, I should have had nothing left—and I don't know that I should have cared. While knocking about, aimless, with Gregory, who would cling to me, I fell in with this surveyor's clearing company, and we joined it. That's all, Errington. It brings us down to this day.'

"'To this day, yes; but have you not something to tell of that?'

"James Wilding nodded. 'This afternoon, when I was at work at the lower clearing, busy enough, and thinking of nothing but my duties, I heard a soft voice close to me. 'Papa,' it said, 'papa.' It was the voice of my child, if I ever heard it. I heard it as clearly and distinctly as you hear mine now. Turning quickly round, thinking I must have been mistaken in the sound, I saw no one was near me but Gregory, and I waited in a sort of startled surprise.

"'Papa, you are coming to us; we want you,' said the voice again; and I remember no more. Why I should have fainted, I know not; certainly not from terror—I suppose it is all a part and portion of that which cannot be understood in this world. When I woke up Gregory was supporting my head. "Did you stumble and hurt yourself, sir?" he asked; and I let him think it. That was my summons, Errington, and to-morrow will be New Year's Day.'

"It sounded mysterious and solemn. 'Let us hope that you may be in some way mistaken, Wilding,' I said, with lame words.

"'How can I be—remembering the past?' he rejoined. 'I am not a superstitious man, never was that; yet I believe I shall not see the setting of to-morrow's sun. Possibly I may see it in a more glorious form in the other land. But that my brief life of sadness and sorrow is at its close, I am as sure of as mortal man can be.'

"'A brief life indeed—if this be its ending. How old are you?'

"'Thirty-seven,' he answered. 'I should be thirty-eight if I lived till next February.'

"I was some years under thirty, but it seemed too young to die.

"Wilding rose. 'I think I shall turn into my blankets,' he said. 'I'm tired somehow; done over.'

"'Why have you not lighted your pipe?'

"He shook his head. 'I shall never light that again, Errington.'

"He disappeared within the hut. I began walking about in mental discomfort. Gregory came up to me and spoke.

"'What is it that is worrying him, Mr. Errington? What was it that he heard to-day by the lower clearing? Has he been telling you?'

"'He has been telling me a good deal of his past life, Gregory. And—yes—he spoke of to-day.'

"'Did he hear a voice that's dead?'

"'He thought so. His child's voice; she said he was coming to them.'

"'Ay, I feared it,' said the man, in a tone of despair. 'To see him faint like that, a thing he never did before, and to hear him question me as to what I had heard, told it me. The child foretold her mother's death, Mr. Errington, and foretold her own.'

"'You knew that much?'

"'Oh, yes. She was an angel, that little one, if ever there was an angel upon earth, and I've often fancied that the angels must have whispered the secret to her. And now it is his turn! God bless him! God reward him for the good man and master he has been!'

"When the rest of us turned in, the lurid sky with the rapid rising of the wind seemed to give near warning of the coming storm, but we heaped high the logs on the fires outside, and drew the blankets close about us beneath the snug roof of the sleeping-huts, defying the blast and rain. And so we got to sleep, though the storm was soon upon the forest in all its fury. About an hour after midnight a terrific crash disturbed us; in an instant every man was upon his feet, rushing out to see the cause. A mighty pine tree had been hurled by the gale to the earth. It fell right athwart the largest of the fires; and as we went forward a torrent of sparks swirled upward and swept away out into the forest. Some of us uttered an exclamation of thankfulness that the tree had failed to touch the sleeping huts; but Gregory, who was the first to advance, gave a cry of horror. There

lay Wilding by the fire, with the huge trunk across his breast. Unable to sleep, he had risen and stolen out to sit by the large fire. Thus fate had overtaken him.

"Gregory knelt down, distressing tears falling from his face. His master, who had not lost consciousness, looked up at him with a faint, happy smile.

"'It is all as it should be, Gregory,' he panted; 'I am going to them in the better land.'

"I spoke to him, but he did not seem to hear me. He was gazing upwards at the orange sky, which almost seemed aflame; his eyes had a far-away look, as if seeing beyond it. Thus he lay for some minutes, his hands joined in the attitude of one who prays, his lips silently moving. Then a change passed over his face.

"'Yes, yes; I see them,' he whispered in a sort of joyous eagerness; 'a goodly company—all angels of brightness. My dear ones, I am coming.'

"Very gradually his eyes closed. There was a long-drawn sigh, and all was over.

"And so, through the vast and unknown gate of death he passed into that of Paradise. The storm spent its fury, and the dawn came, grey and gloomy, with a dreary mist and driving rain, which shrouded forest and river and mountain from our view, blotting from our vision the fair face of nature. But James Wilding had awakened amid the splendours of eternal morning, there to enter into the New Year in sweet communion with those he loved; the New Year of Immortality."

Kate drew a deep breath. "Oh, Bertie, what a solemn story. Can it be true?"

"Undeniably true, Kate, so far as my portion in it is concerned. And I think I can answer for the part of it which I did not witness."

"Well, it is very strange; very solemn!"

"Solemn enough, Kate, to have kept you a silent listener," I put in.

"Now, Tom, don't begin to lecture me. Bertie, what became of Gregory? I like that Gregory."

"What became of him immediately afterwards, I don't know, for I left the camp. Three or four years later, when I was at the Diggings in California, I came across Gregory, honest and kindly as ever. He was keeping a store, Kate, and growing rich."

"Well, Bertie, it is a beautiful though sad story, and I thank you for it; just the story to be told on New Year's Day."

THOMAS ERRINGTON.

M. L. GOW. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"WATCH FOR THE SEVEN OF SPADES," SHE SAID, AS THE CARDS DROPPED SWIFTLY FROM HER FINGERS.

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER V.

WIZARD'S GOLD.

"AND the next morning, when he awoke and looked, behold! all the gold he had gained by his bargain was turned into dead leaves."

A fragment of a long-forgotten fairy tale of his boyish days; long-forgotten, till Edric Poynter woke next morning with the words on his lips.

It was absurd that it should rise to his recollection, word for word now, yet not more absurd than all that had befallen him throughout the long hours of the past night.

All the day's experiences had been lived through again in a wild fantastic guise. He had been standing in the dark church of St. Fridolin's—knee-deep in golden coins, of which he was frantically offering handfuls—for what? He could not tell, nor would the dark veiled figure on the altar steps answer him when he asked it. "Not for Gold, nor Love," said Euphrosyne's voice, and the dark veil melted, leaving Mrs. Damien smiling at him. "Not the price of a single rose amongst it all," she said and passed on, her arms full of crimson flowers. Then Elsie Paramount's pretty pale face gazed mournfully out of the gloom, holding the thorny stem to her breast. "Withered and gone;" and she sighed herself away, and the air was filled with the scent of dying roses, or the faint, subtle perfume that had exhaled from Euphrosyne's garments, that the touch of her fingers had left on his over night, and the dead leaves rustled down—down—down.

The level sun-rays of a last May morning flooded his room as he awoke, steeping him in their wizard's gold to the chin; the rustle of the leaves was the light fall of wood ash from his newly lighted fire, and the shadowy form grew definite as that of private Carver, his soldier servant, announcing the fact that it was "A quarter to five, sir."

A hasty plunge into uniform, a sharp walk to the ranges, and the

anxieties attendant on the shooting of a party of two score recruits, left him no time to pursue the fable to its application. And when, on his return after a second and more deliberate toilette, he entered the mess-room in search of breakfast and letters, the sight of a dainty little envelope in the rack wiped away from his memory even the uncomfortable thrill with which he had first missed the tiger's claw from his watch-chain.

A gracious little note repeating Mrs. Damien's invitation to dinner, the "At Home" card for the same evening, and a visiting card with the new address deeply underscored. Three actual, tangible treasures. He was not the churl to grudge their price. He was still schoolboy enough to have made a red mark against "Monday the 5th" in the calendar that hung on his wall, and to have scored off right joyfully this first intervening day. Only five more, and yet, with the perversity of human nature, he almost quarrelled with the brief interval. Had it been longer, then he might have contrived to interpose a call, in place of the one of which he had been defrauded.

He couldn't very well do so now, of course, but there were the Archdales. Why had he not thought of them sooner? They were very great friends of hers, she had said. He ought to call there at any rate, and, by some blessed chance, he might possibly meet her there, or, at least, hear of her: either of which alone, in his present frame of mind, he counted worth the trouble of the journey three times told.

It was curious, and not exactly pleasant, to find himself once more speeding townwards again by the same train, and on a similar errand to that of three days ago. Only three days, and what a changed outlook! He remembered half-incredulously his misgivings, his savage desperation born of constant thwarting, his hot and cold shy fits.

Then he was painfully groping for the dropped end of a cobweb thread of chance acquaintanceship.

Now he held on to a silken cord of friendliness and mutual interests. His place, though possibly a humble one, in Mrs. Damien's regard, was secured. His welcome was certain; his absence would be noted.

A marvellous change. A gain so great that he would be a churl to grudge the price. After all—what was it?

"As much and no more than I do for you," the woman had said. Moderate, certainly; but he wished she had made it a cash payment. She was welcome to any help he could give her of course, but he didn't see quite what form his help could take. Some superstitious fancy he supposed. Even so. She had been obeying the leading of a superstitious fancy in his case, and what had been the result? Why should she not be as fortunate in her own?

How did she work it? Chiromancy? Edric opened his strong young hand with its square-tipped fingers, and gazed perplexedly at the criss-cross lines of the palm. "Line of Life, Line of the Heart,

Line of the Liver. Mounts of Jupiter, Saturn, Venus." He had made them all out by the help of a book; but neither date nor address could he get out of any of them!

Astrology? That was more possible. But, according to the encyclopædia, that could only be worked with a sort of celestial globe turned inside out; an almanac, compasses, and quadrants, and a whole cart-load of "plant," which she certainly did not bear concealed about her person on that occasion. "Written on your forehead." That was a decidedly uncomfortable thing to consider, and Edric involuntarily removed his hat, and gave his sun-tanned brow and close clipped fair locks a rub or two as he reflected on it.

"I don't seem to see it, and the more I look at it the less I like it," was his rather obscure conclusion, as the train stopped at Charing Cross, and he gave an involuntary unquiet glance around before he left the carriage.

No fresh adventure awaited him. The station had returned to its normal aspect, and he arrived in due course in Lady Archdale's drawing-room, awaiting the appearance of his hostess.

It was not a pleasant room to wait in by any means. Square and precise, doing much credit to the labours of the housemaid. Every chair seemed to stand on its own pattern of the carpet, either half of the chimney piece and chiffonier reflected the other half with unerring exactness. Everything was one of a set or a pair; and when Edric placed himself at one end of the centre ottoman he felt quite afflicted at the unsymmetrical effect, and wished he had brought another man in a grey suit to match, with his stick and legs at corresponding angles, to balance him at the other end. Even the flowers looked prim in their tidy pyramid on one table, and neat little tufts here and there.

He sat for some time with tolerable patience, amusing himself with mental fancy portraits of the "Miss Archdale" whom Mrs. Damien had mentioned. She would look as old as her mamma, he decided, and be dressed very much like her. They would occupy those two low chairs on either side of the window, and make alternate little speeches to him, like versicle and response, and he would keep his eyes on the clock, and depart in exactly fifteen minutes after their appearance.

Here a door grated on its hinges, and there entered, with stately step and slow, a magnificent blood-hound, deep-chested, tawny-muzzled, with careworn lines in his wise old face. He walked solemnly up to Edric, and sniffed him carefully; then, throwing his head back, would have made some remark, but checked himself suddenly, and sat down with a flop. Edric made some friendly advances, which met with no response. After a minute or two the dog got up, and looked him over again exhaustively.

"What are you?" he said as plainly as dog could speak. "You smell honest. You don't belong here. You're not a visitor, for nobody's entertaining you. Why don't you go and tune the piano,

or take the gas-meter, or do something to account for your presence?"

"I want to see your mistress, old fellow," said Edric, answering him. "Just fetch her, will you?"

The hound gave a sudden wriggle and wag of his long smooth tail. "Come along," it said, and he stepped briskly back to the door by which he had entered, scratched it wider open, shoved aside a portière, and looked over his shoulder with an air of invitation as he did so.

Edric hesitated, then followed, and beheld a pretty little interior, with a half-blocked-up north light, an easel filling nearly all the available space, and the back of a young lady in a brown holland pinafore, with her right sleeve rolled up to her elbow, painting in some minute detail on a large canvas with absorbed intentness. The dog was evidently too well-trained to touch her, but he sat down as close as he dared and gave a meaning snatch of a whimper.

"Good old Cuss! What is it?" she answered him, putting her left hand back to caress him. He took it in his big red jaw as softly as any retriever and gave it a gentle tug.

"Anything wrong? Is Puss looking at the love birds? Well, why don't you frighten her? Oh, I forgot the mistress's headache. I must come, must I?" And to Edric's untold relief she laid aside her brush, and rose.

"Miss Archdale—?" hesitated Edric, in surprise.

"Mr. Poynter?" asked the young lady, holding her hand out frankly, as if pretty sure of the fact.

Hester Archdale was not beautiful. A little nut-brown maid with straight dark eyebrows above quick-glancing wide-open eyes, a saucy nose and a determined chin, a bewitching little mouth that took fifty different expressions in as many seconds, and not an ugly curve amongst them all, with gleaming, small white teeth and a dimple at the corner. A straight, slender, alert young creature, who looked physically incapable of being sad, or bored, or fretful, whose laugh was as exhilarating to hear as a blackbird's song when the cherries hang ripe, and whose face was as pleasant to look on as a bunch of fresh-plucked cowslips.

"Your card was brought to me ten minutes ago," she went on; "but I had no idea that you were alone here. I suppose my father is out. My mother is not well enough to see anyone to-day."

"Cuss has been doing the honours——"

"Hush! You are not to know *that* name. Daddy gave it him because he was born on Ash Wednesday, and while we were with the regiment it didn't matter. But now he is in society mamma won't have it; so to the public he is Roswal, and only gets his own name for a treat now and then, when we are quite alone. Eh, Cuss?"

The great hound had been standing looking from one to the other with a comprehending gaze in his red eyes, and now considering the

introduction made and the subject disposed of, stretched out his two huge paws in front, and yawned a mighty yawn, like the gape of an heraldic lion, then swallowed a deep bass bark hastily.

"Good boy. He knows his mistress is ill. Do you care to see his portrait?" Hester asked, leading the way back to her studio.

"If I do not interrupt your work——"

"Not a bit. I am only spoiling it, going on with tired eyes."

She threw open the shutters and turned her canvas to the light. It contained two figures. Roswal dashing through a bit of tangled thicket in the act of springing on a small boy in doublet and hose, who, his tiny toy-sword raised on high, was attempting to defend himself. The dog was nearly finished, well and spiritedly done. The child scarcely more than an outline.

"I hope you recognise the scene. The hound and the young Buccleuch?" Then, seeing Edric's doubtful look, she picked up "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," and read:—

> "I ween you then had seen with joy
> The bearing of that gallant boy,
> Well worthy of his noble sire.
> His wet cheek glowed 'twixt fear and ire,
> He held his little bat on high,
> And faced the bloodhound manfully."

"But it's no good," she broke off suddenly; "I shall never get the expression," tossing the book down despairingly. "Cuss *won't* glare (you *know* you won't, old Softy), and look at his paw!"

"It's a very good paw."

"But the muscles ought to distend somehow, as if he meant tearing and rending; but nothing on earth will induce him to lay anything but a velvet touch on Jock."

"The boy, you mean? He looks like a portrait, and a good one."

"My brother, the ugliest child alive, only mamma can't perceive it. As I had to paint him for her, I thought the situation might invest him with sentiment. He can look like a small hero on occasion."

Cuss here looked from one to the other, as much as to say, "Why don't you sit down?" and flopped down himself by way of example, with a hospitable wave of his tail.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Hester cried, when Edric demurred; "and so will Daddy be if you can't wait to see him. There is so much that we are longing to ask you."

She had swept a pile of parti-coloured drapery off the only other chair in the studio, and Edric gladly seated himself, declaring his readiness to submit to any amount of cross-examination.

"Tell me what sort of a C.O. Colonel Borrodale makes, and what nduced Major Bellasys to retire—we never could understand that." And so forth and so forth she ran on, showing a most amazingly

complete acquaintance with the interior economy of the regiment, its movements and politics. They had talked themselves into thorough good-fellowship, these two young people, before Edric again reluctantly rose to depart.

"Dear old Daddy, wouldn't he be back again with you if he could!" she sighed, when her questions and his answers were alike exhausted. "Good-bye then, if you must go? There is one more point on which I *should* have liked to have satisfied my mind; but, perhaps ——"

"And that is ——?"

"Rose—Mrs. Damien told me—" He resumed his seat at once; the reward that he had promised to himself had at last surely come. "She would have given anything to know—what business you had in St. Fridolin's last Monday."

Edric very nearly jumped up again and fled. He could have done so quite gracefully, for Hester had only flung the question at him lightly as it were, with a laugh and a gay little glance, that left it possible for him to reply as lightly. The answer did not come readily, however. He began it, checked himself, pulled his moustache and looked at her consideringly with his honest blue eyes. Then almost as much to his own surprise as hers, broke out with:

"I'll tell you all about it; the whole truth from beginning to end, if you don't mind listening; for I'm bothered, horribly bothered about it all, and more by having to keep it to myself than by anything else."

Hester's eyes opened wide at this exordium, as well they might; but she said nothing; merely dropped her hand on Cuss's head and listened for more. The ice broken, Edric dived in boldly. He had perforce kept silent till then on his experiences, as much on Mrs. Damien's account as his own; also from the little hope he had of any possible assistance from his usual associates. But now, this bright, capable little maiden, with her candid eyes and trust-inspiring manner, seemed the very fittest of confidants. It was so easy to tell her everything, somehow. She had such a pleasant way of listening; a wise, considering little air; evidently not laughing at him, nor thrilled, nor absorbed; only bent on getting all the facts clear before her, and forming a just conclusion on them. The adventure sounded much less romantic and portentous when he heard himself relate it—with certain necessary modifications and abridgments as concerned his own part therein—but just as puzzling.

"Now tell me what you think about it."

"I think she has made a good bargain," said downright Hester. "She found you were looking for Rose, and happened to know where to find her, and you have given her a sort of blank cheque in repayment."

"But how did she know what I wanted?"

"Followed you—asked Miss Cadogan's housemaid—the man at

the post-office. Any woman with her wits about her could have done as much."

"But *why* did she follow me?"

"Ah! that's the real puzzle of the whole, and I give it up. You will know when you hear from her again. I hope you will tell me the end."

"Of course. Only please don't mention it to Mrs. Damien. I feel somehow responsible for bringing her and that woman together, and it has troubled me more than I can tell you. How *could* she know Mrs. Damien existed?"

"Oh, Rose knows all sorts of queer people at St. Fridolin's. I wouldn't distress myself about that. You'll find most likely that you'll be called upon to pay two pounds twelve and sixpence, the exact sum required to prevent a sick husband and five starving children from being turned into the street. Or she'll want you to buy some new patent toothpick or beetle-destroyer, or cigar-holder—a reduction on taking a quantity—or four large oil-paintings, the last works of her defunct husband. Why, my dear—" Hester stopped in full swing, blushing furiously. "I beg your pardon. I really forgot for a moment that I was not giving Daddy the benefit of my knowledge of the world's pitfalls."

Edric smiled pleasantly. "Thank you very much. We shall meet on Monday, shall we not? I will tell you the end of my adventure if I ever arrive at it. Good bye."

"Good bye," said Hester, with downcast eyes and a grave shake of the hand. Roswal looked up, as if to say, "I've heard that remark three times before. Does he *really* mean going at last?" and finding Edric actually departing, saw him politely off the premises and returned to the studio. There, to his surprise, his usually dignified little mistress dropped on the floor beside him, and giving him a passionate hug, cried, with her eyes hidden in the thick, soft wrinkles of his neck: "Oh Cuss! dear, dear old Cuss! Never tell anybody how foolish I looked just now. Wasn't it nice of him not to laugh too much? Cuss, I hope he'll get into no scrape. Shouldn't you like to go and take care of him? And oh, Cuss, won't it be nice to see him again next Monday?"

Edric caught his train, well satisfied with his afternoon's work. He found two other officers from Shorncliffe in his carriage.

"Heard the news, Poynter?" asked one of them, his great friend, Major Carroll. "We're off at last."

"Off? When? Where?"

"Next week, perhaps. To Portsmouth."

"Next week? Oh, come! Who started that shave?" asked he, with a dismal attempt to look sceptical.

"I didn't. And it isn't a shave. Not at all. Doudney knows all about it. He always does. Cabinet ministers invariably confide in Doudney, don't you know. Portsmouth means Egypt, and Egypt means fighting. *Now* don't you see?"

"Doudney's friends in the Cabinet have sold him before now," was all Edric's reply, but the news sounded true to him this time. And when he re-entered his hut, at the sight of his three precious treasures lying on his writing-table, the moral of his old fairy tale rushed back into his memory, and he seemed to see the golden promise of his days to come falling into sere and dead leaves before his eyes.

And, as Hester said, he had given a blank cheque in payment.

CHAPTER VI.

ST. FRIDOLIN THE HERMIT. (RETROSPECTIVE.)

WHEN Edric, greedily counting his golden moments by Mrs. Damien's side in the churchyard of St. Fridolin's had resentfully grudged but one of them to the mention of its Vicar, little he guessed that with the coming of Eustace Stannard to St. Fridolin's, a long twelvemonth ago, began the weaving of that web into which he insensibly but surely was even then being drawn.

Twelve months ago. Just at the time that he, on board the Indian troopship, impatiently counted the days that lay between him and England; just at the time when Rose Damien in the height of the gay London season began to weary a little of its excitement and sigh for fresh worlds to conquer; two strands drawn all unconsciously by the finger of fate, one from the East and one from the West, to meet and mingle at their appointed time: while a third—Euphrosyne—dark, watchful, grimly patient, bided her turn awaiting the dawning of the chance that must so surely come to her. Just at that time began the story of the Vicar's coming to St. Fridolin's.

It must needs be told here, and the events which followed it, in as brief a retrospect as may be.

A year ago, then, Edric might have read in one of the leading journals of the day the following paragraph:—

"It is with considerable surprise and deep regret that the congregation of St. Ermentrude's have received the news of the resignation of their Vicar, the Hon. and Rev. Eustace Stannard, who has held the living for barely twelve months. Mr. Stannard has made his mark as one of the most powerful and eloquent preachers of the time. Rumours have been current that the vacant stall of St. Stephen's was about to be offered him, but these, we believe, will prove to be unfounded, as it is understood that the reverend gentleman intends to reside abroad for some years. It will be remembered as a curious coincidence that Mr. Stannard's father, Lord Altcar (then Mr. Redgrave Stannard), retired from public life with the same startling unexpectedness when the highest prizes of his political career lay within his reach."

There were variations on the theme, of course. "Another Secession to Rome," announced the *Grindstone*. "Overwork and affection of the brain," deplored the *Acolyte*. The *Upper Ten* hinted in horror-struck italics at "The simultaneous disappearance of a lovely

peeress of Ritualistic views, a regular attendant at St. Ermentrude's;" while *Veracity* demanded, "Who receives and checks the accounts of the offertories?" and, "Whether a certain reverend gentleman's connection with the Turf had not been for many years an open secret?"

It was a curious testimony to the man's character that society, as a rule, took these more exciting suggestions for what they were worth, and decided that neither love nor money was the moving spring of Eustace Stannard's unexpected proceeding, and contented itself with marvelling greatly thereat. Had the truth been known the marvel would have been greater still. It would have been the last idea to occur to society that Eustace Stannard, its spoilt favourite, was only tired of *it*. But so it was. His career, from his earliest college days, had been such a brilliant series of successes—successes won at so little cost to himself—that he grew first amazed, then doubtful, then cynical and despondent.

It was his nature to be keenly critical of his own work, and bitterly conscious of his own shortcomings. The praise of men—except those whose judgment he happened to respect—was pain and shame to him, and indiscriminate admiration a positive affront. Society would not be debarred from its bestowal, nevertheless, let him receive it never so ungraciously. St. Ermentrude's was thronged to suffocation by the most select of fashionable mobs on the Sundays when it was known he was to preach. He was quoted, reported, imitated, discussed in society papers till human nature could bear no more.

In a fit of sudden mistrust of himself, his work, and the genuineness of his mission, he sent in his resignation to the Bishop and started off in search of some world-forgotten spot where no man should have heard of St. Ermentrude's, or care whether he was Lord Altcar's eldest son or not; where he should be able to get at the real, not the fictitious value of his work, find peace and quiet, and write articles in the *Church Quarterly*.

When an early Christian found the temptations of the world too many for him, he was wont, we are told, to bid adieu to Rome, Byzantium, or Alexandria, as the case might be, and seek in the mountains or desert a place for meditation and self-communion.

Eustace Stannard went into the City.

In less than a month after his resignation of St. Ermentrude's; when his wondering friends had talked the subject out and tired of it; he revived their flagging interest by appearing in town again, and a few weeks later was inducted into the living of St. Fridolin the Hermit, situated no man in society except the Bishop knew where.

Let no man look to see St. Fridolin's church as Eustace Stannard's eyes beheld it first in those days of mid-June. It has gone; vanished from the face of the earth as completely as the cell of St. Fridolin himself. It had a grey old tower that had survived the destruction of the original building in the great fire, in which swung a brazen turn-

coat of a bell whose many sins might well have cracked it. A bell that had rung "for joye" at the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, and later on had rung back King James from Faversham, and rung in King William from Holland with equal enthusiasm.

The body of the church had been restored by some unknown follower of Wren, in humble imitation of a classic temple. Bald and uninteresting without, within it was dingily magnificent with dark wood-work and tarnished gilding. A great, black, undecipherable altar-piece, devoutly believed in as a Carlo Maratti, was surmounted by two smirking gilded angels, between which a dilapidated pelican pecked at her tarnished breast, under a mean window containing the arms of the Worshipful Company of Cheesemongers.

Mr. Paramount, the little old Churchwarden, still speaks of St. Fridolin's as an interior unequalled in its chaste magnificence and solemn splendour since the days of Solomon's Temple. It was, therefore, somewhat of a shock to him, after making it his duty to explain to the new Vicar that he should resolutely oppose any modern Ritualistic innovations or decorations, crosses, altar lights, or flowers, which he protested against as "unlicensed ornament and unauthorised symbol," to have his attention rather sharply directed to the pelican, the window with "Azure, three cheeses in dexter chief Or, &c.," and the three colossal Christian Graces, adorning the monument to a departed Vicar, and to be asked where he found "unlicensed ornament and unauthorised symbol" if not here?

He retreated from the discussion silenced if not exactly convinced, and Eustace wondered for a day and a half what he could possibly have said to affront the old gentleman.

Close by the church, within the churchyard bounds, stood the Vicarage, in which no Vicar had dwelt for generations. It was a dreary abode, with faded paintings and dusty carvings, with shut-up rooms, ghostly with the relics of dead-and-gone occupants, and crooked passages haunted by unaccountable echoes. It suited the Vicar's work, and perhaps his mood. He furnished as much as he absolutely required, and installed in charge his tidy old housekeeper, Mrs. Goodliffe: to whose orderly soul he brought daily tribulation by never coming in for a regular meal, and encouraging the inroads of all sorts of undesirable parishioners over her snowy doorsteps and immaculate oil-cloth. Here, as the year rolled on, he lived his busy monotonous, unjoyous life, as secluded from human intercourse beyond the parish bounds as if he had been the original Fridolin the Anker (*i.e.*, hermit), who, as the parish records told, built the church and his cell in the marshes adjoining four centuries ago.

Now according to all precedent no hermit's existence could be considered complete without the temptations of emissaries from the outer world striving by lure and guile to win back their lost companion. These were not lacking to Mr. Stannard had he found time or inclination to heed them. There followed him at first a certain influx of

worshippers from the West—such of his late congregation as had carriages, that is to say—filling the tall pews with marvels of art millinery, and leaving suggestions of Piesse and Lubin about the fusty, doomed green baize. He was not at all gratified by their devotion: in fact, felt a certain grim pleasure in watching the numbers diminishing as the season waned, leaving place for the congregation he wished to draw to him.

September came and went, and he might have thought himself safe, for town was empty and the wicked world disporting itself abroad over the face of the innocent country. One day is very like another in St. Fridolin's. But Eustace was country-bred, and even there felt the air charged with hints of moorland and heather, of tramps over the crackling stubble, and the sharp ring of guns amongst the yellowing copses. In town it was a day of semi-fog, and he had preached his morning sermon to an almost invisible congregation.

"Don't you know me, or *won't* you know me?" asked a voice of him suddenly, as he left the church by the vestry door. A figure in the fog, that seemed to lift and lighten as she approached, an outstretched hand—a voice of silver—and the fairest face eyes ever looked upon. He touched the slim fingers doubtfully.

"I beg your pardon, if for a moment I had forgotten you. You belong to the days that seem so far away now. What has brought you to St. Fridolin's?"

She looked full at him with two great lovely inscrutable eyes. Eyes at once radiant with purpose and sparkling with fun. A long, steady, regal gaze, as of one who felt her notice an honour.

"You are not at all pleased to see me here," she said, with her usual directness and a flash of superb astonishment in the violet eyes at the astounding discovery.

"If you mean *there*"—and he indicated the church—"I know many others whom I would sooner meet. Those who have a better right there."

"But will they come?" asked Mrs. Damien, like Hotspur.

"If I can bring them in. That is what I am here for."

"And can no one help you? Is there no work that anyone—that I might do?"

The Vicar glanced at the velvet gown and many-buttoned gloves of his would-be helper, and smiled with ironical pity.

"District-visiting? In a brougham, with a footman to hand round the tracts? Thank you. I am afraid we are hardly prepared for that yet at St. Fridolin's. I beg your pardon," he added hastily; "that was an unworthy speech. Forgive it. Why *should* I refuse help so frankly offered? I really don't see, though, what *you* can do for us."

Queen Rose looked so suspiciously meek that the Vicar might have known she felt sure of getting her way.

"If you really think there is not a person here who would be the better for my help and friendship, I am answered," she said softly.

The Vicar looked at her consideringly. Perhaps then, for the first time, his perceptions received any distinct impression of her individuality. She had been erstwhile one of the undistinguishable flock of brilliant creatures who used to madden him with their admiration and soft incense of flattery; who came to him on Sunday to be excited and thrilled, as they went on a week-day to the last new play; ready, when the time came, to desert him and his teaching at a day's notice for some newer attraction. The woman who stood before him was of a different clay. More beautiful, if that mattered; more purposeful, more capable. She would either help or hinder him mightily, he felt; and somehow he suspected it would be the latter.

"How do you mean to begin?" he asked at length. Mrs. Damien's eyes danced under their down-dropped lashes.

"Can't you give me an introduction to somebody who belongs here? I want some new friends. I have exhausted one phase of English society pretty much, I think; I should like to see another. Don't you think some people here might care to know me and let me be friends with them?"

"I should think they might," admitted the Vicar, slowly and much against his will. He was irate with himself for watching the play of her beautiful lips, and noticing the soft, dark sweep of her eyelashes against her cheek. The great eyes flashed up suddenly at him all alight with eagerness and bright thoughts, but dropped again under his dark scrutiny.

"You had better consult Mr. de Cressy. He shall call upon you to-morrow." And then Mr. Stannard bade her a stiff adieu, feeling rather as if he had taken some unknown compound into his hands that might prove valuable, or might go off with sudden explosion and blow him and his to utter destruction.

"A fine lady's freak," he muttered consolingly, "and not likely to prove a lasting one."

CHAPTER VII.

A BLACK SEVEN. (RETROSPECTIVE.)

THERE were other and more dangerous elements fermenting under the surface calm of his parish, had he but known it, and he came very nigh upon touching on some of them the very next day.

It was on that occasion that he discovered Lavender Row.

It was no small achievement for a stranger, such as he was. From Lavender Row to the busiest thoroughfare in the City is but a stone-cast, and yet men have lived their working days through from year's end to year's end unaware of its existence.

There is a restaurant and a public-house in the neighbourhood, whose inhabitants might direct an explorer; but the clerks in the

offices of the Nicaraguan and Inter-Oceanic Tramcars Company, Limited, occupying the first floor of the classic pile which is its next door neighbour, though they could, if it so pleased them, drop pebbles from their plate-glass back windows down its crooked chimneys, might be puzzled to arrive at them by any other route. A little passage, one-flag wide, with a post in the middle, leads down beside the restaurant to a two-flag-wide court, one side of which is formed by a blank sooty wall, behind which an engine, hard at some unknown work, measures the minutes away with alternate stamp and clatter all day long. Facing it stands Lavender Row, one of the last bits of the London of the last Edward.

Three little low tile-roofed dwellings, sunk three steps below the level of the pavement, with over-hanging upper stories, low-browed doorways, and windows that not long ago were latticed: once, no doubt, fair country cottages, where the lavender bushes flowered amid green pastures, stretching away to the sparkling river's brink.

No one goes to look at them, no one sketches them, no one asks how they came there. There they lie, as forgotten as a dropped pin in the crack of a pavement.

Even Mr. Paramount can tell nothing about them. He pays his rent, not an exorbitant one, to a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn; but whether they represent an owner ignorant of the value of his property, or a City company too wealthy to concern itself about it, he has never found out.

A long slant of sunshine struggled into the little court, and illumined the very house Mr. Stannard was in search of. A great heavy door, studded with iron nails, stood wide open on to a flagged passage, dividing the width of the house. He entered and knocked at the first door on the right at a venture. He fancied he heard a reply, and opened it. The little interior that met his view remained for many days on his mind as singular and pretty, and possessing, he did not know how, some special interest for him.

It was a small parlour, low and dark. Heavy beams supported the ceiling, and the thickness of the wall made a deep window-seat, in the corner of which, full in the one narrow beam of sunshine that entered, crouched a slight girlish figure.

He recognised the lame daughter that was always at his churchwarden's side on Sundays—a spare little creature, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years old, in a childish cotton frock, with ruffled curly hair, through which the light shone. Some common scarlet runners, trained outside the window, made a bright background for her delicately pretty face, out of which two great luminous eyes gazed in terror at his entrance. He hastened to prevent her from rising; but her hand seemed only just to flutter into his, and be snatched away, and her eyes glanced wildly round in a very panic of shyness, as if seeking some way of escape.

In sheer compassion he gave his message as briefly as he could,

and received her anxious assurances that father would not be home for many an hour to come. Then he would have gone had not the wish seized him to try and inspire a little confidence in this forlorn, frightened-looking child, if child she were. The stray shaft of light was caught and reflected on so many bright points: the shining oil-cloth on the table, the brass knobs of the fire-irons, the glass in the corner cupboard, and the little glinting rows of brass knobs in the horsehair-covered chairs: that it had made the gloom of the rest deeper, and he had not seen at first that another woman was sitting with her back to the window, over the fire in the high black arm-chair, huddled up, with knees and nose almost touching. She now rose, and hobbled off without taking notice of him.

"Who is that?" he ventured to ask.

"A neighbour—Mrs. Beltran—a very kind neighbour," she answered, in a flutter, but speaking more freely: as shy people often do with one hearer only. It was no very difficult task that he had set himself, after all. When the first shock of confronting this formidable stranger—and all strangers were more or less formidable to Elsie Paramount—had worn off, she began to find something curiously pleasant in the grave attention with which her timid little remarks were received, and a disposition growing on her to speak of herself and her interests to an extent that it was alarming to reflect on afterwards. She had actually talked to him about the old times when father was quite well off, before "the firm" failed and ruined him. How the brothers and sisters were scattered, and only herself and Sampson left. Sampson was in an office, doing pretty well *this* time. The Vicar seemed to understand the doubtful inflection, and be sorry for her, and then he talked about himself and St. Fridolin's quite as if he thought her worth talking to—that was a comfort to remember.

She was so frail, so pretty, so delicate, and altogether incongruous—like a daisy in a street pavement, Eustace thought. He turned for a last look as he left the house, and caught a shy glance from behind her scarlet flowers. The great, heavy wooden shutter of the room overhead had half swung to, and, had he looked up there, he might have caught the searching gaze of another pair of eyes fixed on him with no good meaning, from the depths of the dark crevice.

Elsie was smiling to herself in a pleasant, vague musing, when the door opened softly and the "neighbour" re-entered.

The little black shawl that had been huddled over her head and shoulders now hung on her arm, her step was light and springy, and her bent form erect, supple, full of lithe grace and strength. She looked at Elsie with a direct, expressionless gaze, her eyelids gradually closing till they left mere slits through which her eyes seemed to gleam with intensified brilliance. Her lips curved with a suggestion of mockery, and waited patiently for Elsie to speak first.

The Beltrans, Elsie's fellow-lodgers, were exceptions to every rule of life in Lavender Row. They had lived there for nearly a year

now, and came and went, and eat, and slept, with utter disregard of ordinary habits and precedents.

Sometimes Mr. Beltran would disappear for weeks and months at a time, and then spend day after day at home in bed. Elsie could hear him stumbling upstairs lightly in the early grey mornings, and would hear sounds suggestive of getting up in the course of the afternoon; and, later on, had once or twice encountered in the hall a smiling, dark complexioned man, wearing very new glossy clothes, and a great deal of jewellery, who left a strong whiff of combined tobacco and millefleurs on the air as he passed by.

Mrs. Beltran's comings and goings were as erratic as her husband's; but, as they seemed on excellent terms, paid their rent punctually, and kept no children, pet animals, or other element of discord about the premises, their fellow-lodgers ceased to concern themselves about them. They were "foreigners," and that accounted for everything.

A nod and a smile as she passed Elsie at work in her window, then a word at the open door, and so it grew to be a habit for Mrs. Beltran to drop in casually, but only when Elsie was all alone. There was an odd sense of latent power about her perfectly fascinating to the girl. Then she would listen with profoundest interest to the smallest of girlish gossip, and tell in return of strange countries and adventures. Indeed, it is to be feared that sundry flashes of reckless talk, and a dare-devil laugh, with which her narrations were occasionally spiced, had a wicked attraction in themselves for the naughty little romantic child.

Elsie, roused from her dream, looked at her half impatiently at first, then seemed to awake more fully, with a start. "Was it him you meant?" she asked, in an awed whisper.

"The Dark King," assented Mrs. Beltran.

A large work-basket stood on the table. Lifting it carefully off, Mrs. Beltran proceeded to roll off the oilcloth cover, disclosing the white wood top, on which were arranged a number of small playing-cards, arranged in a peculiar pattern.

It would be useless to describe it in detail, except so far as that it consisted of the cards of one pack, starting from the Queen of Hearts, arranged in a pattern of diagonal lines of varying length: the spaces between which were to be filled from the cards of other packs on some principle known only to the initiated.

The scheme had been interrupted during the placing of the cards of the second pack, which had started from the King of Spades. Mrs. Beltran went on dealing and placing with a swiftness and dexterity that were in themselves noteworthy, talking all the time with soft, mechanical volubility for Elsie's benefit, and yet with her mind evidently set on the working out of some problem for her own private satisfaction. "The Dark King, yes, there, just as I told you; he crosses your life, my child. No, I have misplaced a card. Your lives do not *cross*, they *meet*. For good, did you ask? But yes, cer-

tainly. Not for love though. Do not set your thoughts on him, my little one."

"Mrs. Beltran! how could I do such a thing?" gasped Elsie, scandalised. "He is the Vicar, and the son of a lord."

"Eh?" Mrs. Beltran raised her eyebrows and looked attentive. "You must tell me all about him by-and-by. He is so good, you say. And his sermons so beautiful. When will you take me to hear one?"

It was Elsie's turn to look surprised. Delightful as Mrs. Beltran's companionship had been, it had never suggested church-going somehow. "I so seldom hear him," she lamented. "Only on Sundays. I can't go alone, and father disapproves of week-day services."

Mrs. Beltran nodded again. The second pack was exhausted, and the cards disposed in order. "You say he preaches this evening. Your father will not be at home, nor, consequently, your brother, eh?" Her white teeth gleamed maliciously, and she gave a knowing nod as she spoke, while Elsie sighed. "We will go then. It will prevent you fretting after them both. I have nothing more to tell you about him. You will owe him some trouble and some good fortune eventually, that is all."

"And the next?" asked Elsie, curiously. "The Fair Woman?"

Mrs. Beltran drew out a third pack from the pocket of her apron, which seemed as plentifully supplied as the sleeve of the Heathen Chinee. They were not the usual-sized card, but fully a third smaller, and printed on board as light as that used for visiting-cards, with plain, white, glazed backs.

Mrs. Beltran gave the pack to Elsie to cut three times, then dealt the cards in a heap face upwards till a Diamond Queen appeared, when she proceeded to fit the remaining cards into her pattern, still continuing her careless talk, so at variance with the intense scrutiny of her black eyes. "Here she is, you see, following the Dark King. And here she crosses your path—once—twice. Distrust that fair woman, even while accepting her benefits. She will turn against you at last—not till the coming of the Fair King, though. Aha! Now cut this pack. Here he is. You are getting interested in him, are you? Little prude! I dare not hint at his good fortune. A lover for you, my Elsie. Young, handsome, and rich! Take care of him and keep him to yourself when you get him, my little Queen of Hearts."

"Oh! don't!" pleaded the girl, putting up her hand to screen her hot cheeks, with a ring of such pain in her voice that Mrs. Beltran stopped astonished. "A lover? No. Tell that to anyone else—not to *me!*"

The poor, wasted little hands seemed in one eloquent gesture at once to call attention to, and plead for pity for, her crippled state, while her indignant eyes and flaming cheeks protested against such mockery.

Even Mrs. Beltran was touched, or had the heart to seem so.

"Who said you were always to be ill and miserable, and apart from other girls? Didn't I tell you great things were coming for you?" And she began to pass her forefinger anew over the cards she had first laid down. "Wait for the first Black Seven ——"

"Tell me *that!*" cried the girl. "That was to be your card. Don't talk to me about fair or dark kings. Tell me at once what *you* are going to do for me."

Mrs. Beltran waited until she had placed the last card of the pack which she had commenced with the King of Hearts, carefully reading it to herself; though, in compliance with Elsie's request, she communicated no more of the results to her.

She took out from her pocket the last pack, handed it to Elsie to cut as before, and commenced to deal, facing the cards. "Watch for the Seven of Spades," she said, as the cards dropped swiftly from her fingers. The heap on the table grew, and the pack she held diminished one by one, till within a few of the end. She looked surprised, and her brows bent in perplexity.

"I must be going to have very little to do with you after all," and the last card dropped from her fingers as she spoke. "Can we both have missed it? That is unlucky, very unlucky," she said seriously, and taking up the pack, shuffled it, and gave it to Elsie to cut afresh.

Again she dealt the cards slowly and carefully to the end. Long before reaching it her practised fingers had told her a card was missing. The Seven of Spades had disappeared from the pack.

She shook her apron, and turned out the pocket. Each pack had been held by a little band of coloured ribbon, so that it would have seemed impossible for a card to have escaped. Nevertheless, she looked carefully on the floor about, and at last went on her knees to search under the table.

"Has it slipped into the kilting of your skirt?" Elsie asked. "I fancied I saw——"

"I remember!" interrupted Mrs. Beltran, emerging from under the table. "I know now! I was looking over them upstairs one night alone and dropped them all on the floor. It has slipped away through the cracks of the boards there. I nearly lost a letter so one day. But that it should have been that card!" And she growled a comment in Creole French between her teeth that, fortunately for Elsie's sense of propriety, was unintelligible to her. She stood for an instant almost white with anger, wrenching the pack between her hands in a vain effort to tear it.

"Don't! What a pity!" cried Elsie, as she, with another fierce word, thrust them between the bars of the grate; "the card might have been found again."

"The card might have been found, but the chance was lost. They can never again be the first cards touched by your fingers. And they

were running so clearly, too. Ah!" with a sort of impatient snarl and a stamp. "Let them go!"

When she turned again to Elsie, she had composed her features into a resolute smile. "Don't speak to me of them again, but tell me at what time I shall come to take you with me to church this evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

TOLD IN THE VESTRY. (RETROSPECTIVE.)

When Elsie and her companion reached St. Fridolin's that evening they found the church already well filled, for Mr. Stannard's Thursday lectures had become well-known as something worth hearing. There were as many of his own parishioners as he could reasonably expect to see, and several strangers.

One carriage that Elsie had noticed on the previous Sunday was driving away, and the verger was ushering into the foremost pew its occupant, a tall, dignified lady, closely veiled; while she and Mrs. Beltran found their seats in a quiet corner of the side aisle, near another friend from Lavender Row. Eustace found an excitement, or more justly, an inspiration, in addressing the motley assemblage here that had been lacking in ordinary Sunday preaching to his brilliant congregation at St. Ermentrude's. "Those who are here to-night," he thought, "have come not for my sake, but for the sake of what I can give them," and he gave of his best from the fulness of his heart and soul. He was carried beyond himself by the vastness of his subject, so that he heard not when poor Elsie, excited, alarmed, and conscious of being a very naughty girl in being there at all, burst into an unmanageable fit of hysterical sobbing, and was led away by Mrs. Beltran and her friend Mrs. Ridge. Nor did he note the gratifying fact that having seen Elsie part of the way home, Mrs. Beltran returned and unobtrusively regained her place.

The tall lady in front had started at Elsie's cry, glanced round, and then sunk on her knees, hiding her face in her hands. She remained in this attitude, hidden from general view by the high backed pew, till the dispersion of the congregation. Almost all had gone before she slowly rose and made her way down the aisle, the old verger waiting obsequiously at the door in readiness to call up her carriage.

Slowly and more slowly she stepped, till in the very doorway she stopped. "I must! I must!" the verger thought he heard her say to herself, and she sank on the last of the open seats in the centre of the aisle. "Send Mr. Stannard here, if you please," she said to the old man in a quick, imperative tone. "Has he gone yet?"

"Nay, madam, no farther than the vestry, I dare say." And he trotted off, turning out unnecessary gas-lights on his way, till only one flickering standard remained.

Before Eustace could reach her she came forward to meet him, quickly yet falteringly, and laid her hands on his arm, peering up into his face. "I have something to say to you. Not here, though. Take me somewhere where I can speak to you in safety."

"Let me take you to the vestry. There is no one here but ourselves."

She hesitated, looking fearfully round the dark interior, which was still as a grave, but for a momentary gentle stir that might have been the flutter of a bird's wings aloft, or even the rustle of her own silken skirts.

"I am afraid!" she whispered. "Afraid to speak; afraid of dying without having spoken. I can trust you. You are strong, and brave, and honest. If there is a man in the world who can help me it is you."

"Let me try, at any rate. Your secret shall be as if it had never been told. You are sure of that?"

She bowed her head and he supported her up the dark side aisle to the vestry, from the half-open door of which a stream of light shot forth.

The vestry was a curiously shaped room, a sort of three-cornered excrescence on the main building, cramped and crowded by a great cupboard reaching to the ceiling, where the choir surplices hung, with massive doors that were always swinging open, and a lock that worked by fits and starts. There were quaint old chests too, full of church records, a table many sizes too large, and two chairs. Even the bright lamp that burned there only half lighted the place, and left great nooks and angles of shadow.

The Vicar gave a final and effectual slam to the swinging door, and placed his chair against it, offering the other to his visitor; but she stood in the doorway peering out into the darkness.

"Is no one there? Are you sure no one can hear us? I thought someone passed us just now."

"Only the verger, old Totterdale; I'll ask him." The Vicar sounded a small hand-bell, and the figure of the old man appeared, dark against the dim grey opening of the porch, and shuffled hurriedly towards them. The Vicar went to meet him and returned.

"He has been all over the Church. It is quite empty, and he will lock it up for the night when you go. He is very deaf, and will wait for you in the porch out of hearing."

They re-entered the vestry, and the lady sank into her chair, leaning her arms on the table and resting her face in her hands for a short time. "Do you know me?" she asked, looking up at him suddenly.

There was a soft, plaintive inflection in her speech that reminded him of de Cressy somehow, but her face was strange to him. It was the face of a woman long past her youth, but still wonderfully handsome. Soft masses of wavy white hair were piled high above a white forehead in sharp contrast with her dark, weary, restless eyes.

Her delicate aquiline features had the somewhat over-refined, fastidious expression that high-arched, fine eyebrows and raised nostrils give to the face they belong to. She was a woman to whom diamonds, trailing silken robes, and the uppermost rooms at feasts ought to come by right of birth Eustace thought, as he looked at her with quiet attention, waiting for her to speak again.

"No, you do not know me. I am glad of it. If you did, how could you believe what I am going to tell you? That I—I, of all women ——"

She stopped, her breath came quickly and heavily, the rings on her ungloved hands grated as she clasped them together. The next minute she was kneeling at his feet, her head thrown back, and her hands raised to him imploringly.

"Oh, help me! save me! I am a miserable, guilty woman. You preached of repentance and hope—you spoke of confession and forgiveness. Tell me what pardon there is for me? What place of repentance can I find while my sin stays by me?"

"None," spoke Eustace, solemnly and sadly. "But be thankful that there *is* no sin from whose burden deliverance is impossible."

"You shall tell me what to do," she moaned. "I shall go mad or die, with my secret untold, if you will not hear me. You shall tell me what reparation I can make. Surely the time is not past?"

She rose to her feet, and stood veiling herself in the folds of the costly lace that draped her head and shoulders, and shrinking away from him while she spoke.

"How can you guess the crime that clings to me? I brought my husband to his death and renounced my child. Can years of prayer, or seas of penitential tears, blot out that?"

"Tell me the whole story," said Eustace, gravely and authoritatively. "You have no choice now."

"It was so long ago, and I was so young—so young and so ignorant. A poor little neglected child, running wild about our Irish home, with nobody to care for me but blind Aunt Kitty; no companions but my foster sister, Katty Magrath, and her little brothers and sisters. My father never came near the place. No one did. We had enough to eat and drink, but I wore clothes like Katty's, except when I put on my mother's old jewellery. Once, I remember, Aunt de Cressy sent me some finery: a green satin pelisse, like her own daughter's, and a bonnet with feathers, white and green. I remember my reflection in the brook as I ran about in them for months and months barefoot."

She sank into her chair when she began to speak, and now sat half smiling for a second at the remembrance.

"De Cressy!" interrupted the Vicar. "Are you any relation?"

"I am Lionel's cousin. He is your curate, is he not? Yes, I ——" She stopped short, her eyes fixed in sudden alarm on Eustace's. "Listen!"

Her lips seemed to breathe inaudibly. Both sat with attention strained to the uttermost. There was no sound in all the great echoing vault of the church, nor in the narrow bounds of the vestry, and yet by some certain momentary arousing of that sixth sense to which no man has given a name, which is not hearing, seeing, or feeling, but a sort of combination of all three, each had felt in that instant's pause that they were not alone. He rose, carried the lamp to the door, and threw its light around once or twice.

"The echo from some noise outside, I suppose," he said, returning and closing the door after him.

She had risen too, and looked fearfully around the small space about her. "What does it matter," she said, at last, "who hears my name? I am Lady Valeria Meynell, and my husband was Oliver Meynell—the great, wise, wealthy, and philanthropic Oliver Meynell. Ah! you have heard of him, and of me—of all my good deeds, and of the children I have brought up to follow in his footsteps." And she laughed a little cynical laugh. "He was a good man too. He reclaimed me, and made me what I am. I was afraid of him, you see, and dare not be anything but what he bade me. We were happy together; but it is not less the truth than when I married him I had another husband and a living child."

She seemed to force the words from her lips as it were loudly, and with a sort of bravado; then her voice fell, and her face grew white and scared as she went on rapidly.

"Jack never was my husband, they would have told you; and they took my little child from me at its birth, and swore to me it was dead; but I knew better."

She paused a moment. Eustace was silent and attentive.

"I never knew what brought Jack to Glenara—my home," she continued. "He was the first gentleman I had ever seen, except my father, and I thought him a prince, and ran after him like a little dog. He was spending a month's leave in the mountains, sketching and fishing, and I used to go off with him, roaming the glens the summer days long, without word or thought of harm. When the time came for him to go, I just kissed Aunt Kitty, and ran over the hill to the Magraths, where a strange priest married us, and off we went to Dublin together. *He* to mean me harm—my Jack! Never! It was fine fun at first, going about and seeing sights with him, dressed in all the beautiful gowns he bought me; but it didn't last. Jack was handsome and rich, and would be a baronet some day, and there were plenty to tell him how he had thrown himself away in marrying me. Then I hated the grand ladies he knew, who would laugh at me even while they spoke so sweetly to "La Belle Sauvage," as I heard one call me. And, in truth, no better than a savage was I when I heard her. Jack joked me about it when I told him. I think he had been drinking, or he never would have spoken as he did. I caught up a knife to give him his answer, but he twisted it out of my hand, and

threw it out of the window, and locked me in the room 'till my tantrums were over.' I saw him go past the window, and I knew he was going to her."

"Poor child!" sighed the Vicar, seeing before him not the stately, remorse-stricken woman, but the beautiful, wild, passionate, forlorn child of the story.

"I called to him. I beat my hands sore on the door. Someone came at last and let me out, and just as I was I would have rushed bare-headed through the streets in search of him, but that the person, whoever it was, held my hands and stopped me. Then I saw it was my father.

"Never mind what he said to me. I grow sick with rage and shame to this day when I think of it. He took me away that hour and put me in the convent of the Sacred Heart, where my Aunt was abbess; and then—went back to Dublin and shot Jack dead in the Phœnix Park at sunrise next morning."

"Dead!" the Vicar ejaculated, with a long-drawn breath of relief, despite his sympathy. She turned sharply on him.

"*Was* he?" she queried, a world of meaning in her dark, doubtful gaze. "I think they lied to me. I think he let them leave him for dead to be rid of me. I think—I know"—she glanced over her shoulder suspiciously as she spoke and drew nearer the Vicar. "I *saw his name in despatches* long after. He *was* alive, and my saintly husband knew it, but would not give me up to him. Liars all!" she cried, with fierce sudden passion, "and amongst them all I am Lost—Lost—Lost!"

There was silence while Eustace stood gravely pondering on this new and serious feature of the case, and Lady Valeria sat with quivering lips and knit brow, afraid to trust her voice again. The flame of anger died out as rapidly as it had flamed up, however, and she went on in weary sullenness.

"Do you want to hear about the convent: how they kept me there eating my heart out for months waiting for news that never came: and then sent me away—dreading scandal you understand? My boy was born at Biddy Magrath's—I mean Katty's mother and my foster-mother, and died—so they told me. I was too ill to know. My father was like a madman at the thoughts of his own folly, for Jack was in his grave—or they all thought so then, for certain, and the wrong he had done me could never be righted. I must go back to the convent again; it was the only place for me now. I was too ill and wretched to care what became of me, and let them do as they pleased."

"You went back to the convent as a postulant?" he inquired.

She nodded.

"They would have it so; but when I got well and strong, and felt the hatefulness of it all, I ran away, about a year after. It was the best way. They never would have let me go. I was out marketing

with Sister Clare one day, when we met a nice little man, like a clergyman, who walked alongside of us, reading bits of the Bible out loud, and preaching a little now and then. Sister Clare crossed herself, and bid me never listen to a word. He was, she said, the agent of the Irish Church Missionary Society, a most pestilential evil-doer. She was an awful old gossip, and instead of shutting her eyes and hurrying home, she just dawdled about watching him gather the people around him at the street corner and give away tracts. I watched him too, and settled how he should help me. Next day, when we went out, I had a note ready written in my sleeve. Old Sister Catherine was with me, and she was just as keen to see what was going on as Sister Clare. At the first turning we came face to face with the man, followed by half the rabble of the place, and in a minute he had dropped a tract into Sister Catherine's basket, and put another in my hand, and as he did so I squeezed the note into his. I knew he wouldn't fail me. I slipped down the garden that night, scrambled over a broken-down corner of the wall, found my friend in waiting with a bonnet and shawl, as I had bid him, left my veil in the nearest hedge, and long before anyone missed me was safe in the train on my way to Glenara."

"Why did you go there?"

"To find my boy—my own living baby-boy. All those long, lonely nights in my cell I had heard him wailing for me. I had felt his little fingers in the dark, clutching at my neck. I knew he was living, and I went to seek for him. The little missionary talked to me all the way, and I agreed to everything he said. It made him very happy, and he put the whole story of my escape and conversion into his next report. I hope it did him some good with his employers. He knew Aunt de Cressy well. She was at Glenara, and he thought I was going to her; but when we parted I made my way at once to Biddy Magrath's. The little cabin was roofless and empty, and while I stood wondering and terrified, a neighbour came past driving a cow. 'Save us! an' is it Biddy you're seekin'? Sure, she and Stephen and the childther are all gone this six months since.' 'The children?' I asked. 'How many?' 'Four of them: no less. Katty, an' Norah an' the weeshy baby, Stephen; an it's safe in America they'll be by this time.' I had lost him again. I thanked the girl, and, with my heart breaking, turned back to Glenara—and then Aunt de Cressy carried me off to England."

"But your vows?" asked the Vicar, slightly scandalised. She shrugged her shoulders with bitter contempt.

"*They* never troubled me. My father found me out, but when Aunt de Cressy told him the rich young banker, Oliver Meynell, was in love with me, not a word would *he* hear of the Sacred Heart again either. I did try to hold out. I told Oliver the whole truth; every word. *I* did not want to marry him. Never."

"It was a grievous wrong——" the Vicar began.

"I tell you I could not help it," she retorted passionately. "I could stand out against my father; I could persuade Aunt de Cressy; but when Oliver came near me I was dumb, powerless. His cold blue eyes used to light up when they looked at me; his hand used to hold mine with a grip of steel. I used to plead and protest, but his look would kill the words on my lips. I used to turn away from him, but I felt him drawing me nearer and nearer, resist as I would."

"But did no thought of your husband—of your baby-boy come between you and him?"

"*I could* not think of them when he was there. My mind seemed a blank, which he could fill as he pleased. He used to talk to me about the errors of Rome, and the noble sphere of power and usefulness that lay before me. I tell you I cared not one whit for him or his views, or my life; sometimes I hated him—always I feared him—but I married him. Sinful, dishonoured wretch that I was!"

"Is 'Jack,' your first husband, alive now?" Eustace constrained himself to ask. "You must give me no half confidence."

"I never cared to know. He may be. He is 'Sir John,' I suppose; married to some other woman, perhaps. *He* left me willingly, but my boy was stolen from me. It is for *him* I am sorrowing and repenting."

"You believe he is still living?"

"Believe? I *know* it. I have been hoping and seeking ever since Oliver died, and at last, by a chance—I cannot tell you how—I got news that he still lives. Lives! and away from me!"

"And you want me to bring him to you; or, to find him, and bring you news of him?"

Her face lighted with rapture, but his upraised hand stayed her reply.

"I will undertake nothing unless I possess your full confidence. You have gained news of him by chance—in some manner you do not care to make known. Tell me what it amounted to."

"The Magraths took my boy for their own. Their little Stephen died in the fever, so mine took his place. Afterwards in America, when other children were born to them, they were ready enough to part with him to a rich English lady, who has adopted him and brought him up as a gentleman—the poor boy!"

The Vicar listened frowningly.

"Do you know where the Magraths are to be found?"

She shook her head. "I have poured out money like water to find them, here and in America, and I have failed."

"Do you know the name of the rich English lady—your son's present name, of course?"

She shook her head again. "I never heard it."

"Why do you call him 'Jack' when he must have been known as 'Stephen?' he asked, suddenly raising his keen piercing eyes to hers.

She frowned uneasily. "I always thought of him by that name,

somehow. I *couldn't* think of him as anything else. I am sure that *is* his name now."

"And he is—how old? Between thirty and forty, or older?" making a random guess at her age—possibly sixty.

She knitted her delicate brows once more, and pressed her thin hands over her eyes.

"I—I can't think he is that. He must be young—quite young. Tall and fair like his father, with kind, bright eyes—blue eyes. I should know them anywhere, and Jack's own smile."

Mr. Stannard frowned. Was this delusion, or wilful mystification? He put the question aside for the present.

"You must let me think this over before I can advise you. You may be much drawn to your son—your first-born—that I can well believe,"—she gave a low, yearning cry and stretched her hands out by way of response—"but are you doing him a kindness in revealing the sad secret of his birth? Will he love you, or owe you any thanks for proving him base born?"

"Base born!" she almost shrieked, starting to her feet again. "Never! Could I have lived till now if I had believed that? It was my father's hatred of Jack made him say the word. Jack never would have wronged me. Never! The marriage was a good one. He swore it when he thought he was dying, though he couldn't rightly prove it. No; he may have lived to hate and forsake me, but he never dared to do me any dishonour, and, now that Oliver is dead, I'll move Heaven and earth that justice shall be done to my boy!"

"Stop!" almost shouted the Vicar, startled out of all his composure. "You must not. You shall not. Not till I have set before you what you are going to do. You are going to blacken the memories of your dead husband and father; to bring crushing disgrace on your other children; and to proclaim yourself—what? Ask your son if he would not rather die believing himself peasant born but honest—than own for a mother the vile creature that you would make yourself out to be? It is the act of a mad woman. You come to me for help and counsel. I counsel, I command silence. Now and hereafter, silence. For the sake of your living children, for the sake of your dead husband and father, in the name of your unknown son, I enjoin it. This is the burden laid on you to bear to the end. Cast it from you if you dare."

He stopped abruptly, startled at his own vehemence and the effect of his words. Lady Valeria had shrunk away under his first indignant outburst, and cowered down in her chair beneath his out-stretched hand, all scared and white. Then she began to tremble violently as in an ague fit; long drawn shuddering sighs escaped her, sighs that became sobs and ended in a passionate weeping. The Vicar was used to weeping women, to the vociferous, unrestrained lamentations of the lower orders, but he was struck with the oddly childish character

of her grief. It was more like the clearing up shower of tears after a fit of naughtiness, than the scalding drops of shame and contrition, or even the sobs of hysterical excitement. He waited for a little and then spoke a few encouraging words softly and at intervals till the fit was over. She looked up presently, mechanically arranging her disordered head-dress and draping her shawl around her, listening with a quiet, subdued air.

"Promise me," he ended, "that you will drive away the thought of self-betrayal from your mind. You can do nothing but harm. Your son has been given into good hands, you say, and has no need of you. The pain of the separation has fallen as it should, on the one who has sinned. What can you do for him but bring sorrow and shame?"

"I can make him rich," she said eagerly. "You do not know how wealthy I am. He shall have Glenara and all the money Mr. Meynell settled on me to keep it up. That was the bribe that tempted my poor father, money enough to free the estate—which is to go to my eldest son. Do you think I could bear to think of Oliver there?"

Eustace groaned in spirit at the task which lay before him. Here was an embarrassing family secret given into his keeping. Lady Valeria's mind was evidently failing her beneath the burden of it. Or did her sudden frantic craving for spiritual aid simply mean a desperate effort to secure an accomplice in some wild scheme of restitution in secret? He must have time to think it out before committing himself farther.

"I will give you help to the utmost of my power," he said deliberately; "and will keep your confidence sacred; but I must beg of you some further help. I want the date of your marriage and your son's birth. I want the year when you had the last news of him. I want his real name—his father's name."

"No!" she almost screamed, then controlled herself by a strong effort. She kept her eyes fixed on his, while a sort of dumb struggle seemed to shake her frame with agony. "I can't," she gasped at length. "I will not. When they told me that dreadful day that I had no right to it, then I vowed that it should never pass my lips again till my dying day. I should go mad if I were to see or hear it now."

She sat panting and trembling, her eyes glittering wildly in the lamplight, now and then sending sharp sideway glances at Eustace.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"I will write to you and fix a time," she said, rising. "I will go now. Good-bye."

Eustace opened the door and looked out.

"Wait until I have seen whether your carriage is there," he said, and hastened to the porch, where he found the old verger on his favourite three-legged stool, half asleep, but resolutely maintaining his right to see everybody out of the church, and the church locked up to his satisfaction before he departed.

Lady Valeria clung to Eustace's arm suddenly as they went down the aisle. "We are followed!" she whispered. "There it is again! No, you needn't look; it is by no earthly tread. I know it well. Hush! It is by the spirit of the man I have wronged—of Oliver, my husband. It will follow me to my grave."

She hurried out into the clear night air and cold autumn moonlight. "Good-bye," she said again, and then, bending towards the Vicar, whispered: "I feared him once, but the days are coming when my boy will be by my side, and neither man nor spirit can harm me then." And her dark eyes sparkled through a sudden rain of tears.

He hastened back more disturbed than he cared to own even to himself. He cast one rapid glance round the vestry as he turned down the lamp, and, with the latest flicker, caught sight of a small white oblong at his feet.

He looked again at it before the light flickered out, and the second glimpse was so startling as to make him in all haste rekindle the light and look again.

It was a tiny playing-card. The Seven of Spades.

(*To be continued.*)

THE STORY OF TWO OLD PEOPLE.

From the French of MARC MONNIER.

ONCE he was twenty and she only ten,
She was a child, he scarcely in his prime:
Youth seemed so long and age so distant then,
And noon came not, as now, ere morning time.

But later on, they chanced again to meet;
And he was thirty, and she twenty now:
"Why, he is old," exclaimed the maiden sweet,
And passed, with careless heart and cloudless brow.

Ten years (a weary round) roll on again,
Whose days and weeks, so like each other, pass,
That when they meet 'tis he, with sudden pain,
Who cries, in turn, "Why she is old, alas!"

But often on those tender April eves,
When hearts beat time to hidden melodies,
"Why was I never loved?" he asks—and grieves.
"Why did I never love?" she asks—and sighs.

And now, opprest with vain regret, they say,
As years wear on in ever-deepening gloom:
"Children, enjoy the sunshine while you may,
And pluck the flower in its morning bloom."

ALEX. HAYES.

A TRAGEDY.

THE windows of the room, called the Buttery, which Mr. Preen used as an office in his house at Duck Brook, were thrown open to the warm, pure air. It was about the hottest part of the afternoon. Oliver Preen sat back in his chair before the large table covered with papers, waiting in idleness and inward rebellion—rebellion against the untoward fate which had latterly condemned him to this dreary and monotonous life. Taking out his pocket-handkerchief with a fling, he passed it over his fair, mild face, which was very hot just now.

To day, of all days, Oliver had wanted to be at liberty, whereas he was being kept a prisoner longer than usual, and for nothing. When Mr. Preen rode out after breakfast in the morning he had left Oliver a couple of letters to copy as a beginning, remarking that there was a great deal to do that day, double work, and he should be back to it in half-an-hour. The double work arose from the fact that none had been done the day before, as Mr. Preen was out. For that day, Monday—this was Tuesday—was the day Mr. Preen had paid us a visit at Crabb Cot, to be paid for Taffy, the pony, and had then gone to Norton, and afterwards to Stoulton, and it had taken him the best part of the day. So the double work was waiting. But the half hours and the hours had passed on, and Mr. Preen had not yet returned. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, and they had dined without him.

Oliver, who did not dare to absent himself without permission, and perhaps was too conscientious to do so, left his chair for the window. The old garden was quite a wilderness of blossom and colour, with all kinds of homely flowers crowded into it. The young man stretched forth his hand and plucked a spray or two of jessamine, which grew against the wall. Idly smelling it he lost himself in a vision of the days gone by; his careless, happy life at Tours, in his aunt's luxurious home, when he had no fear of a dark future, had only to dress well and ride or drive out, and idly enjoy himself.

Suddenly he was brought back to reality. The sound of hoofs, clattering into the fold-yard behind the house, struck upon his ear, and he knew his father had come home.

Ten minutes yet, or more, and then Mr. Preen came into the room, his little dark face looking darker and more cross than usual. He had been snatching some light refreshment. He sat down at once in his place at the table, facing the windows; Oliver sat opposite to him.

"What have you done?" asked he.

"I have only copied those two letters; there was nothing else to do," replied Oliver.

"Could you not have looked over the pile of letters which came this morning, to see whether there were any you could answer?" growled Mr. Preen.

"Why no, father," replied Oliver in slight surprise; "I did not know I might look at them. And if I had looked I should not have known what to reply."

Mr. Preen began reading the letters over at railroad speed, dictating answers for Oliver to write, writing some himself. This took time. He had been unexpectedly detained at the other end of Captain Falkner's land by some business which had vexed him. Most of these letters were from farmers and others, about the new patent agricultural implements for which Mr. Preen had taken the agency. He wished to push the sale of them as it gave him a good percentage.

The answers, addressed and stamped for the post, at length lay ready on the table. Mr. Preen then took out his pocket-book and extracted from it that ten-pound bank-note given him the previous morning by Mr. Todhetley for the children's pony, the note he had got the Squire to indorse, as I have already told. Letting the bank-note lie open before him, Mr. Preen penned a few lines, as follows, Oliver looking on:—

"Dear Sir,—I enclose you the ten pounds. Have not been able to send it before. Truly yours, G. Preen."

Mr. Preen folded the sheet on which he had written this, put the bank-note within it, and enclosed all in a good-sized business envelope, which he fastened securely down. He then addressed it to John Paul, Esquire, Islip, and put on a postage stamp.

"I shall seal this, Oliver," he remarked; "it's safer. Get the candle and the wax. Here, you can seal it," he added, taking the signet ring from his finger, on which was engraved the crest of the Preen family.

Oliver lighted a candle kept on a stand at the back for such purposes, brought it to the table, and sealed the letter with a large, imposing red seal. As he passed the ring and letter back to his father, he spoke.

"If you are particularly anxious that the letter should reach Mr. Paul safely, father, and of course you are so, as it contains money, why did you not send it by hand? I would have taken it to him."

"There's nothing safer than the post," returned Mr. Preen, "and I want him to have it to-morrow morning."

Oliver laughed. "I could have taken it this evening, father. I can do so still, if you like."

"No, it shall go by post. You want to be off to Mac Everil, I suppose."

"No I do not," replied Oliver. "Had I been able to finish here this morning I might have gone over this afternoon; it is too late now."

"You had nothing to do all day yesterday," growled his father.

"Oh, yes, I know. I am not grumbling."

Mr. Preen put the letter into his pocket, gathered up the pile of other letters, handed half of them to his son, for it was a pretty good heap, and they started for the post, about three minutes' walk.

The small shop containing the post office at Duck Brook was kept by Mrs. Sym; she sold sweetstuff, also tapes and cottons. Young Sym, her son, a growing youth, delivered the letters, which were brought in by a mail-cart. She was a clean, tidy woman of middle age; who was never seen out of a muslin cap with a wide border and a black bow, a handkerchief crossed over her shoulders, and a checked apron.

Oliver, of lighter step than his father, reached the post-office first and tumbled his portion of the letters into the box placed in the window to receive them. The next moment Mr. Preen put his in also, together with the letter addressed to Mr. Paul.

"We are too late," observed Oliver. "I thought we should be."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Preen, in surprise, as he turned round. "Too late! Why how can the afternoon have gone on!" he continued, his eyes falling on the clock of the little grey church which stood beyond the triangle of houses, the hands of which were pointing to a quarter past five.

"If you knew it was so late why did you not say so?" he asked sharply of his son.

"I was not sure until I saw the clock; I only thought it must be late by the time we had been at work," replied Oliver.

"I might have sent you over with that letter as you suggested, had I known it would not go to-night. I wonder whether Dame Sym would give it back to me."

He dived down the two steps into the shop as he spoke, Oliver following. Dame Sym—so Duck Brook called her—stood knitting behind the little counter, an employment she took up at spare moments.

"Mrs. Sym, I've just put some letters into the box, not perceiving that it was past five o'clock," began Mr. Preen civilly. "I suppose they'll not go to-night?"

"Can't sir," replied the humble post-mistress. "The bag's made up."

"There's one letter that will hardly bear delay. It is for Mr. Paul of Islip. If you can return it me out of the box I will send it over by hand at once; my son will take it."

"But it is not possible, sir. Once a letter is put into the box I dare not give it back again," remonstrated Mrs. Sym, gazing amiably at Mr. Preen through her spectacles, whose round glasses had a trick of glistening when at right angles with the light.

"You might stretch a point for once, to oblige me," returned Mr. Preen, fretfully.

"And I'm sure I'd not need to be pressed to do it, sir, if I could,"

she cried in her hearty way. "But I dare not break the rules, sir; I might lose my place. Our orders are not to open the receiving box until the time for making-up, or give a letter back on any pretence whatever."

Mr. Preen saw that further argument would be useless. She was a kindly, obliging old body, but upright to the last degree in all that related to her place. Anything that she believed (right or wrong) might not be done she stuck to.

"Obstinate as the grave," muttered he.

Dame Sym did not hear; she had turned away to serve a child who came in for a bullseye. Mr. Preen waited.

"When will the letter go?" he asked, as the child went out.

"By to-morrow's day mail, sir. It will be delivered at Islip—I think you said Islip, Mr. Preen—about half-past four, or so, in the afternoon."

"Is the delay of much consequence, sir?" inquired Oliver, as he and his father turned out of the shop.

"No," said Mr. Preen. "Only I hate letters to be delayed uselessly in the post."

Tea was waiting when they got in. A mutton chop was served with it for Mr. Preen, as he had lost his dinner. Jane ran downstairs, drank a cup of tea in haste, and ran back again. She had been busy in her bedroom all day, smartening-up a dress. A picnic was to be held on Thursday, the next day but one; Jane and Oliver were invited to it, and Jane wanted to look as well at it as other girls.

After tea Oliver sat for ever so long at the open window, reading the Worcester Journal. He then strolled out to the Inlets, sauntered beside the brook, and presently threw himself listlessly upon one of the benches facing it. The sun shone right upon his face there, so he tilted his straw hat over his eyes. That did not do, and he moved to another bench which the trees shaded. He often felt lonely and weary now; this evening especially so; even Jane was not with him.

His thoughts turned to Emma Paul; and a glow, bright as the declining sun rays, shot up in his heart. As long as *she* filled it, he could not be all gloom.

"If I had means to justify it I should speak to her," mused he—as he had told himself forty times over, and forty more. "But when a fellow has no fortune, and no prospect of fortune; when it may be seen by no end of odd signs and tokens that he has not so much as a silver coin in his pocket, how can he ask a girl the one great question of life? Old Paul would send me to the right-about."

He leaned his head sideways for a few minutes against the trunk of a tree, gazing at the reddening sky through the green tracery of the waving boughs; and fell to musing again.

"If she loved me as I love her, she would be glad to wait on as things are, hoping for better times. Lovers, who are thus attached

to each other, do wait for years and years, and are all the happier for it. Sometimes I feel inclined to enlist in a crack regiment. The worst of it is that a fellow rarely rises from the ranks in England to position and honour, as he does in France; they manage things better over there. If old Uncle Edward would only open his purse-strings and buy me a commission, I might —— Halloa!"

A burst of girlish laughter, and a pair of girlish arms, flung round his neck from behind, disturbed Oliver's castles-in-the-air. Jane came forward and sat down beside him. "I thought I should find you here, Oliver," she said.

"Frock finished, Janey?"

"Finished! why no," she exclaimed. "It will hardly be finished by this time to-morrow."

"Why, how idle you must have been!"

"Idle? You don't understand things, or the time it takes to make an old frock into a new one. A dressmaker might have done it in a day, but I'm not a dressmaker, you know, Mr. Oliver."

"Is it a silk gown?"

"It is a mousseline-de-laine, if you chance to be acquainted with that material," answered Janey. "It was very pretty when it was new: pale pink and lilac blossoms upon a cream ground. But it has been washed, and that has made it shrink, and it has to be let out everywhere and lengthened, and the faded silk trimming has to be turned, and—oh, ever so much work. And now, I daresay you are as wise as you were before, Oliver."

"I've heard of washed-out dresses," remarked Oliver. "They look like rags, don't they?"

"Some may. Mine won't. It has washed like a pocket handkerchief, and it looks as good as new."

"Wish my coats would wash," said Oliver. "They are getting shabby and I want some new ones."

Not having any consolation to administer in regard to the coats, Jane did not take up the subject. "What have you been doing all day, Oliver?" she asked.

"Airing my patience in that blessed Buttery," replied he. "Never stirred out of it at all, except for dinner."

"I thought you wanted to get over to Islip this afternoon."

"I might want to get over to the North Pole, and be none the nearer. Mac Everil was bound for some place a mile or two across fields this afternoon, on business for the office, and I promised to go over to walk with him. Promises, though, are like pie-crust, Janey: made to be broken."

Jane nodded assent. "And a promise which you are obliged to break is sure to be one you particularly want to keep. I wish I had a pair of new gloves, Oliver. Pale grey."

"I wish I had half-a-dozen new pairs, for the matter of that. Just look at those little minnows, leaping in the water. How pretty they are!"

He went to the edge of the brook and stood looking down at the small fry. Jane followed. Then they walked about in the Inlets, then sat down again and watched the sunset; and so the evening wore away until they went home.

Jane was shut up again the following day, busy with her dress; Oliver, as usual, was in the Buttery with his father. At twelve o'clock Mr. Preen prepared to go out to keep an appointment at Evesham, leaving Oliver a lot of work to do, very much to his aggravation.

"It's a shame. It will take me all the afternoon to get through it," ran his thoughts—and he would have liked to say so aloud.

"You don't look pleased, young man," remarked his father. "Recollect you will be off duty to-morrow."

Oliver's countenance cleared; his disposition was a pleasant one, never retaining anger long, and he set to his task with a good will. The morrow being the day of the picnic, he would have whole holiday.

At five o'clock the young servant carried the tea-tray into the parlour. Presently Mrs. Preen came in, made the tea, and sat down to wait for her son and daughter. Tired and hot, she was glad of the rest.

Jane ran down stairs, all happiness. "Mamma, it is finished," she cried; "quite finished. It looks so well."

"It had need look well," fretfully retorted Mrs. Preen, who had been unable to get at Jane for any useful purpose these two days, and resented it accordingly.

"When all trades fail I can turn dressmaker," said the girl, gaily. "Where's Oliver?"

"In the Buttery, I expect; he said he had a great deal to do there this afternoon, and I have not seen him about," replied Mrs. Preen, as she poured out the tea. "Not that I should have been likely to see him—shut into that hot kitchen with the ironing."

Jane knew this was a shaft meant for herself. At ordinary times she did her share of the ironing. "I will tell Oliver that tea is ready, mamma," she said, rising to go to the other room. "Why there he is, sitting in the shade under the walnut tree," she exclaimed, happening to look from the window.

"Sitting out in the cool," remarked Mrs. Preen. "I don't blame him, poring all day long over those accounts and things. Call him in, Jane."

"Coming," said Oliver, in response to Jane's call from the open window.

He crossed the grass slowly, fanning himself with his straw hat. His fair face—an unusual thing with him—was scarlet.

"You look red-hot, Oliver," laughed his sister.

"If it is as hot to-morrow as it is to-day we shall get a baking," returned Oliver.

"In this intense weather nothing makes one feel the heat like work, and I suppose you've been hard at it this afternoon," said his mother

in a tone of compassion, for she disliked work naturally very much herself.

"Of course; I had to be," answered Oliver.

He and Jane sat together under the shade of the walnut tree after tea. When it grew a little cooler they went to the Inlets, that favourite resort of theirs; a spot destined to bear a strange significance for one of them in the days to come; a haunting remembrance.

II.

The white mist, giving promise of a hot and glorious day, had hardly cleared itself from the earth, when, at ten o'clock on the Thursday morning, Jane and Oliver Preen set off in the gig for North Villa, both of them as spruce as you please; Jane in that pretty summer dress she had spent so much work over, a straw hat with its wreath of pink may shading her fair face, Oliver with a white rose in his button-hole. The party was first to assemble at Mrs. Jacob Chandler's, and to go from thence in waggonettes. There had been some trouble about the gig, Mr. Preen wanting it himself that day, or telling Jane and Oliver that he did, and that they could walk. Jane almost cried, declaring she did not care to arrive at North Villa looking like a milkmaid, hot and red with walking; and Mr. Preen gave way. Oliver was to drive himself and Jane, Sam being sent on to Crabb to bring back the gig.

Mr. Preen did not regard the picnic with favour. Mr. Preen could not imagine what anybody could want at one, he said, when ungraciously giving consent to Oliver's absenting himself from that delightful Buttery for a whole day.

Picnics in truth are nearly all alike, and are no doubt more agreeable to the young than to the old. This one was given conjointly by the Jacob Chandlers, the Letsoms, the Coneys, and the Ashtons of Timberdale. A few honorary guests were invited. I call them honorary because they had nothing to do with finding provisions. Tod got an invitation, myself also; and uncommonly vexed we were not to be able to arrive till late in the afternoon. The Beeles from Pigeon Green were coming to spend the day at Crabb Cot, and the Squire would not let us off earlier.

The picnic was held upon Mrs. Cramp's farm, not far from Crabb, and a charming spot for it. Gentle hills and dales, shady groves and mossy glens surrounded the house, which was a very good one. So that it may be said we all were chiefly Mrs. Cramp's guests. Mrs. Cramp made a beaming hostess, and was commander-in-chief at her own tea-table. Tea was taken in her large parlour, to save the bother of carrying things out. Dinner had been taken in the dell, under shade of the high and wide-spreading trees.

They were seated at tea when we got there. Such a large company

at the long table; and such tempting things to eat! I found a seat by Emma Paul, the prettiest girl there; Oliver Preen was next her on the other side. Mary MacEveril made room for Tod beside her. The MacEverils were proud, exclusive people, and Miss MacEveril privately looked down on some of her fellow guests; but Tod was welcome, he was of her own order.

Two or three minutes later Tom Chandler came in; he also had not been able to get away earlier. He shook hands with his aunt, Mrs. Cramp, nodded to the rest of us, and deftly managed to wedge himself in between Emma Paul and young Preen. Preen did not seem pleased, Emma did; and made all the room she could, by crushing me.

"I wouldn't be in your shoes to-morrow morning, young man," began Mr. Chandler, in a serio-comic tone, as he looked at Dick Mac Everil across the table. "To leave the office to its own devices the first thing this morning, in defiance of orders ——"

"Hang the musty old office!" interrupted MacEveril, with a genial laugh.

Valentine Chandler had done the same by his office; pleasure first and business later always with both of them; but Valentine was his own master and MacEveril was not. In point of fact, Mr. Paul, not a man to be set at defiance by his clerks, was in a great rage with Dick MacEveril.

I supposed the attractions of the picnic had been too powerful for Dick, and that he thought the sooner he got to it the better. But this proved to be a fallacy. Mrs. Cramp was setting her nephew right.

"My dear Tom, you are mistaken. Mr. MacEveril did not come this morning; he only got here an hour ago—like two or three more of the young men."

"Oh, did he not, Aunt Mary Ann?" replied Tom, turning his handsome, pleasant face upon her.

"Yes, and if you were not at the office I should like to know what you did with yourself all day, Dick," severely cried Miss MacEveril, bending forward to regard her cousin.

"I went to see the pigeon-match," said Dick, coolly.

"To see the pigeon-match!" she echoed. "How cruel of you! You had better not let papa know."

"If anyone lets him know it will be yourself, Miss Mary. And suppose you hold your tongue now," cried Dick, not very politely.

This little passage-at-arms over, we went on with tea. Afterwards we strolled out of doors and disposed of ourselves at will. Some of the Chandler girls took possession of me, and I went about with them.

When it was getting late, and they had talked me deaf, I began looking about for Tod, and found him on a bench, within the Grove. A sheltered spot. Sitting there, you could look out, but people

could not look in. Mary MacEveril and Georgiana Chandler were with him; Oliver Preen stood close by, leaning against the stump of a tree. I thought how sad his look was, and wondered what made it so.

Within view of us, but not within hearing, in a dark, narrow walk Tom Chandler and Emma Paul were pacing side by side, absorbed evidently in one another. The sun had set, the lovely colours in the sky were giving place to twilight. It was the hour when matter-of-fact prosaic influences change into romance; when, if there's any sentiment within us it is safe to come out.

"It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lovers' vows
Seem sweet in every whispered word,"

as Lord Byron says. And who could discourse on love—the true ring of it, mind—as he did?

"Do sing," said Tod to Miss MacEveril; and I found they had been teasing her to do so for the last five minutes. She had a pleasant voice and sang well.

"I'm sure you don't care to hear me, Mr. Todhetley."

"But I'm sure I do," answered Tod, who would flirt with pretty girls when the fit took him. Flirt and flatter too.

"We should have everyone coming round us."

"Not a soul of them. They are all away somewhere, out of hearing. Do sing me one song."

She began at once, without more ado, choosing an old song that Mrs. Todhetley often chose; one that was a favourite of hers, as it was of mine: "Faithless Emma." Those songs of the old days bore, all of them, a history.

"I wandered once at break of day,
While yet upon the sunless sea
In wanton sighs the breeze delayed,
And o'er the wavy surface played.
Then first the fairest face I knew,
First loved the eye of softest blue,
And ventured, fearful, first to sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma.

So mixed the rose and lily white
That nature seemed uncertain, quite,
To deck her cheek which flower she chose,
The lily or the blushing rose.
I wish I ne'er had seen her eye,
Ne'er seen her cheeks of doubtful dye,
Nor ever, ever dared to sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma.

Now though from early dawn of day,
I rove alone and, anxious, stray
Till night with curtain dark descends,
And day no more its glimmerings lends ;
Yet still, like hers no cheek I find,
No eye like hers, save in my mind,
Where still I fancy that I sip
The sweets that hung upon the lip
Of faithless Emma."

"I think all Emmas are faithless," exclaimed Georgiana, speaking at random, as the last sounds of the sweet song died away.

"A sweeping assertion, Miss Georgie," laughed Tod.

"Anyway, I knew two girls named Emma who were faithless to their engaged lovers, and one of them's not married yet to anyone else," returned Georgie.

"I think I know one Emma who will be true for ever and a day," cried Tod, as he pointed significantly to Emma Paul, still walking side by side with Tom Chandler in the distance.

"I could have told you that before now," said Mary MacEveril. "I have seen it for a long time, though Miss Emma will never confess to it."

"And now, I fancy it will soon be a case," continued Tod.

"A case!" cried Georgie. "What do you mean?"

"A regular case ; dead, and gone, and done for," nodded Tod. "Church bells and wedding gloves, and all the rest of the paraphernalia. Looks like it, anyhow, to-night."

"Oh!" exclaimed Georgie, "then how sly Tom has been over it, never to tell us! Is it really true? I shall ask Valentine."

"The last person likely to know," said Tod. "You'll find it's true enough, Georgie."

"Then ——" Georgie began, and broke off. "Listen!" she cried. "They are beginning to dance on the lawn. Come, Mary." And the two girls moved away, attracted by the scraping of the fiddle.

Oliver Preen moved a step forward from the tree, speaking in a low, calm tone ; but his face was white as death.

"Were you alluding to *them?*" he asked, looking across to those two pacing about. "Why do you say it is a 'case'?"

"Because I am sure it is one," answered Tod. "They have been in love with one another this many a day past, those two, months and months and years. As everyone might see who had eyes, except old Paul. That's why, Preen."

Oliver did not answer. He had his arm round the trunk of a tree looking across as before.

"And I wouldn't stake a fortune that Paul has not seen it also," went on Tod. "All the same, I had a rumour whispered to me to-day that he sees it now, and has said 'Bless you, my

children. 'Tom Chandler is to be made his partner and to marry Emma."

"We are too many girls there, and want you for partners," cried Eliza Letsom, dashing up. "Do come and dance with us, Johnny!"

What else could I do? Or Tod, either.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the party separated. The waggonettes held us all, and nice scrambling and crowding we had for seats. One of the vehicles, after setting down some of its freight —ourselves and the Miss Chandlers—continued its way to Duck Brook with Jane and Oliver Preen.

It was a lovely night. The moon had risen, and was flooding the earth with its soft light. Jane sat looking at it in romantic reverie. Suddenly it struck her that her brother was unusually still; he had not spoken a single word.

"How silent you are, Oliver. You are not asleep, are you?"

Oliver slowly raised his bent head. "Silent?" he repeated. "One can't talk much after a tiring day such as this."

"I think it must be getting on for twelve o'clock," said Jane. "What a delightfully happy day it has been!"

"The one bad day of all my life," groaned Oliver, in spirit. But he broke into the two lines, in pretended gaiety, that some one had sung on the box-seat of the waggonette when leaving Mrs. Cramp's:

> "For the best of all ways to lengthen our days
> Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear."

III.

"My Dear Sir,—Robert Derrick is getting troublesome. He has been here three times in as many days, pressing for ten pounds, the instalment of your debt now due to him. Will you be good enough to transmit it to me, that I may pay and get rid of him.

"Truly yours, "John Paul."

This letter, written by Lawyer Paul of Islip, came to Mr. Preen by the Thursday morning post, just a week after the picnic. It put him into a temper.

"What do Paul's people mean by their carelessness?" he exclaimed angrily, as he snatched a sheet of paper to pen the answer.

"Dear Mr. Paul,—I don't know what you mean. I sent the money to you ten days ago—a bank-note, enclosed in a letter to yourself.

"Truly yours, "G. Preen."

Calling Oliver from his breakfast, Mr. Preen despatched this answer by him at once to the post-office. There was no hurry whatever, since the day mail had gone out, and it would lie in Mrs. Sym's drawer until towards evening, but an angry man knows nothing of patience.

The week since the picnic had not been productive of any particular event, except a little doubt and trouble regarding Dick MacEveril. Mr. Paul was so much annoyed, at Dick's taking French leave to absent himself from the office that day, that he attacked him with hot words when he entered it on the Friday morning. Dick took it very coolly—old Paul said "insolently," and retorted that he wanted a longer holiday than that, a whole fortnight, and that he must have it. Shortly and sharply Mr. Paul told him he could not have it, unless he chose to have it for good.

Dick took him at his word. Catching up his hat and stick, he went out of the office there and then, and had not since appeared at it. Not only that: during the Friday he disappeared also from Islip. Nobody knew for certain whither he had gone, or where he was: unless it might be London. He had made no secret of what he wanted a holiday for. Some young fellow whom he had known in Australia had recently landed at the docks and was in London, and Dick wanted to go up to see him.

Deprived of his friend, and deprived of his heart's love, Oliver Preen was in a bad case. The news of Emma Paul's engagement to Thomas Chandler, and the news that Chandler was to have a share in her father's business, had been made public; the speedy marriage was already talked of. No living person saw what havoc it was making of Oliver Preen. Jane found him unnaturally quiet. He would sit by the hour together and never say a word, to her or to anyone else, apparently plunged in what might be either profound scientific calculations, or grim despondency. It was as if he had the care of the world upon his mind, and at times there would break from him a sudden, long-drawn sigh. Poor Oliver! Earth's sunshine had gone out for him with sweet Emma Paul.

She had not been faithless, like the Faithless Emma of the song. She had never cared for anyone but Tom Chandler, had never given the smallest encouragement to another. Oliver had only deluded himself. To his heart, filled and blinded with its impassioned love, her open, pleasing manners had seemed to be a response, and so he had mistaken her. That was all.

But this is sentiment, which the world, having grown enlightened of late years, practically despises; and we must go on to something more sensible and serious.

The answer sent by Mr. Preen to John Paul of Islip, brought forth an answer in its turn. It was to the effect that Mr. Paul had not seen anything of the letter spoken of by Mr. Preen, or of the money it was said to contain.

This reached Duck Brook on the Saturday morning. Mr. Preen, more puzzled this time than angry, could not make it out.

"Oliver," said he, "which day was it last week that I wrote that letter to Paul of Islip, enclosing a ten-pound note?"

"I don't remember," carelessly replied Oliver. They had not yet

settled to work, and Oliver was stretched out at the open window, talking to a little dog that was leaping up outside.

"Not remember!" indignantly echoed Mr. Preen. "My memory is distracted with a host of cares, but yours has nothing to trouble it. Bring your head in, sir, and attend to me properly."

Oliver dutifully brought his head in, his face red with hanging down. "What was it you asked me, father? I did not quite catch it," he said.

"I asked you if you could remember which day I sent that money to Paul. But I think I remember now for myself. It was the day after I received the bank-note from Mr. Todhetley. That was Monday. Then I sent the letter to Paul with the bank-note in it on the Tuesday. You sealed it for me."

"I remember quite well that it was Tuesday—two days before the picnic," said Oliver.

"Oh, of course; a picnic is a matter to remember anything by," returned Mr. Preen, sarcastically. "Well, Paul says he has never received either money or letter."

"The letter was posted ——" began Oliver, but his father impatiently interrupted him.

"Certainly it was posted. You saw me post it."

"It was too late for the evening's post; Dame Sym said it would go out the next morning," went on Oliver. "Are Paul's people sure they did not receive it?"

"Paul tells me so. Paul is an exact man, and would not tolerate any but exact clerks about him. He writes positively."

"I suppose Mrs. Sym did not forget to forward it?" suggested Oliver.

"What an idiot you are!" retorted his father, by way of being complimentary. "The letter must have gone out safely enough."

Nevertheless, after Mr. Preen had attended to his other letters and to two or three matters they involved, he put on his hat and went to Mrs. Sym's.

The debt for which the money was owing appeared to be a somewhat mysterious one. Robert Derrick, a man who dealt in horses, or in anything else by which he could make money, and attended all fairs near and far, lived about two miles from Islip. One day, about a year back, Derrick presented himself at the office of Mr. Paul, and asked that gentleman if he would sue Gervais Preen for a sum of money, forty pounds, which had been long owing to him. What was it owing for, Mr. Paul inquired; but Derrick declined to say. Instead of suing him, the lawyer wrote to request Mr. Preen to call upon him, which Mr. Preen did. He acknowledged that he did owe the debt—forty pounds—but, like Derrick, he evaded the question when asked what he owed it for. Perhaps it was for a horse, or horses, suggested Mr. Paul. No, it was for nothing of that kind, Mr. Preen replied; it was a strictly private debt.

An arrangement was come to. To pay the whole at once was not,

Mr. Preen said, in his power; but he would pay it by instalments. Ten pounds every six months he would place in Mr. Paul's hands, to be handed to Derrick, whom Mr. Preen refused to see. This arrangement Derrick agreed to. Two instalments had already been paid and the one which seemed to have now miscarried in the post was the third.

"Mrs. Sym," began Mr. Preen, when he had dived into the sweet-stuff shop, and confronted the post-mistress behind her counter, "do you recollect, one day last week, my asking you to give me back a letter which I had just posted, addressed to Mr. Paul of Islip, and you refused?"

"Yes, sir, I do," answered Mrs. Sym. "I was sorry, but ——"

"Never mind that. What I want to ask you is this: did you notice that letter when you made up the bag?"

"I did, sir. I noticed it particularly in consequence of what had passed. It was sealed with a large red seal."

"Just so. Well, Mr. Paul declares that letter has not reached him."

"But it must have reached him," rejoined Mrs. Sym, fastening her glittering spectacles upon the speaker's face. "It had Mr. Paul's address upon it in plain writing, and it went away from here in the bag with the rest of the letters."

"The letter had a ten-pound note in it."

Mrs. Sym paused. "Well, sir, if so, that would not endanger the letter's safety. Who was to know it had? But letters that contain money ought to be registered, Mr. Preen."

"You are sure it went away as usual from here—all safe?"

"Sure and certain, sir. And I think it must have reached Mr. Paul, if I may say so. He may have overlooked it; perhaps let it fall into some part of his desk, unopened. Why, some years ago, there was a great fuss made about a letter which was sent to Captain Falkner, when he was living at the Hall. He came here one day, complaining to me that a letter sent to him by post, which had money in it, had never been delivered. The trouble there was over that lost letter, sir, I couldn't tell you. The Captain accused the post-office in London, for it was London it came from, of never having forwarded it; then he accused me of not sending it out with the delivery. After all, it was himself who had mislaid the letter. He had somehow let it fall unnoticed into a deep drawer of his writing-table when it was handed to him with other letters at the morning's delivery; and there it lay all snug till found, hid away amid a mass of papers. What do you think of that, sir?"

Mr. Preen did not say.

"In all the years I have kept this post-office I can't call to memory one single letter being lost in the transit," she ran on, warming in her own cause. "Why how could it, sir? Once a letter's sent away safe in the bag, there it must be; it can't fall out of it. Your letter was so sent away by me, Mr. Preen, and where should it be if Mr.

Paul hasn't got it? Please tell him, sir, from me, that I'd respectfully suggest he should look well about his desk and places."

Evidently it was not at this side the letter had been lost—if lost it was. Mr. Preen wished the post-mistress good morning, and walked away. Her suggestion had impressed him; he began to think it very likely indeed that Paul had overlooked the letter on its arrival, and would find it about his desk, or table, or some other receptacle for papers.

He drove over to Islip in the gig in the afternoon, taking Oliver with him. Islip reached, he left Oliver in the gig, to wait at the door or drive slowly about as he pleased, while he went into the office to, as he expressed it, "have it out with Paul."

Not at once, however, could he do that, for Mr. Paul was out; but he saw Tom Chandler.

The offices, situated in the heart of Islip, and not a stone's throw from the offices of Valentine Chandler, consisted of three rooms, all on the ground floor. The clerks' room was in front, its windows (painted white, so that no one could see in or out) faced the street; Mr. Paul's room lay behind it and looked on to a garden. There was also a small slip of a room, not much better than a passage, into which Mr. Paul could take clients whose business was very private indeed. Tom Chandler, about to be made a partner, had a desk in Mr. Paul's room as well as one in the clerks' room. It was at the latter that he usually sat.

On this afternoon he was seated at his desk in Mr. Paul's room when Gervais Preen entered. Tom received him with a smile and a hand-shake, and gave him a chair.

"I've come about that letter, Mr. Chandler," began the visitor; "my letter with the ten-pound bank-note in it, which Mr. Paul denies having received."

"I assure you no such letter was received by us——"

"It was addressed in a plain handwriting to Mr. Paul himself, and protected by a seal of red wax with my crest upon it," irritably interrupted the applicant, who hated to be contradicted.

"Mr. Preen, you may believe me when I tell you the letter never reached us," said Tom, a smile crossing his candid, handsome face at the other's irritability.

"Then where is the letter? What became of it?"

"I should say perhaps it was never posted," mildly suggested Tom.

"Not posted!" tartly echoed Mr. Preen. "Why I posted it myself; as Dame Sym, over at Duck Brook, can testify. And my son also, for that matter; he stood by and saw me put it into the box. Dame Sym sent it away in the bag with the rest; she remembers the letter perfectly."

"It never was delivered to us," said Tom, shaking his head. "If —— oh, here is Mr. Paul."

The portly lawyer came into the room, pushing back his iron

grey hair. He sat down at his own desk-table; Mr. Preen drew his chair so as to face him, and the affair was thoroughly gone into. It cannot be denied that the experienced man of law, knowing how difficult it was to Mr. Preen to find money for his debts and his needs, had allowed some faint doubt to float within him in regard to this reported loss. Was it a true loss?—or an invented one? But old Paul read people's characters, as betrayed in their tones and faces, tolerably well; he saw that Preen was in desperate earnest, and he began to believe his story.

"Let me see," said he. "You posted it on Tuesday, the fifteenth. You found it was too late for that night's post, and would not go off until the morrow morning, when, as Dame Sym says, she despatched it. Then we ought to have received it that afternoon—Wednesday, the sixteenth."

"Yes," assented Mr. Preen. "Mrs. Sym wished to respectfully suggest to you, Paul, that you might have overlooked it amidst the other letters at the time it was delivered, and let it drop unseen into some drawer or desk."

"Oh, she did, did she?" cried old Paul, while Tom Chandler laughed. "Give my respects to her, Preen, and tell her I'm not an old woman. We don't get many letters in an afternoon, sometimes not any," he went on. "Can you carry your memory back to that Wednesday afternoon, Chandler?"

"I daresay I shall be able to do so," replied Tom. "Wednesday, the sixteenth.—Was not that the day before the picnic at Aunt Cramp's?"

"What on earth has the picnic to do with it?" sharply demanded Mr. Preen. "All you young men are alike. Oliver could only remember the date of my posting the letter by recalling that of the picnic. You should be above such frivolity."

Tom Chandler laughed. "I remember the day before the picnic for a special reason, sir. MacEveril asked for holiday that he might go to it. I told him he could not have the whole day, we were too busy, but perhaps he might get half of it; upon which he said half a day was no good to him, and gave me some sauce. Yes, that was Wednesday, the sixteenth; and now, having that landmark to go by, I may be able to trace back other events and the number of letters which came in that afternoon."

"Is MacEveril back yet?" asked Preen.

"No," replied Paul. "The captain does not know where he is; no one does know, that I'm aware of. Look here, Preen; as this letter appears to be really lost, and very unaccountably, since Mrs. Sym is sure she sent it off, and I am sure it was never delivered to me, I shall go to our office here now, and inquire about it. Will you come with me?"

Mr. Preen was only too glad to go to any earthly place that was likely to afford news of his ten-pound note, for the loss would be his

and he knew not where he should find another ten pounds to satisfy the insatiable Derrick.

They proceeded along the pavement together, passing Oliver, who was slowly parading the gig up and down the street. His sad face—unusually sad it looked—had a sort of expectancy on it as he turned his gaze from side to side, lest by some happy chance it might catch the form of Emma Paul. Emma might be going to marry another; but, all the same, Oliver could not drop her out of his heart.

They disclaimed all recollection of the letter at the post-office. Had it been for a private individual it might have been remembered, but Mr. Paul had too many letters to allow of that, unless something special called attention to any one of them. Whether the letter in question had reached them by the Islip bag, or whether it had not, they could not say; but they could positively affirm that, if it had, it had been sent out to Mr. Paul.

In returning they overtook the postman on his round, with the afternoon delivery: a young, active man, who seemed to skim over the ground, and was honest as the day.

"Dale," said lawyer Paul, "there has been a letter lost, addressed to me. I wonder whether you chanced to notice such a letter?" And he mentioned the details of the case.

"One day is like another to me in its round of duties, you see, sir," observed the man. "Sealed with a big red seal, you say, sir? Well, it might be, but that's nothing for me to go by; so many of your letters are sealed, sir."

The lawyer returned to his office with Mr. Preen, and entered his own room. Tom Chandler heard them and came swiftly through the door which opened from the clerks' department, a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"I remember all about the letters that were brought in on Wednesday week," said he. "I can recall the whole of the circumstances; they were rather unusual."

And what Thomas Chandler recalled, and proceeded to relate, will be told next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

Old Gateway, Halmstad.

A STILL unclouded sky, and all the freshness and beauty of early morning, made of Marstrand a wonderfully out-of-the-world and lovely picture.

Over the way on Cow Island the flag was flying above the long white house, and its owner having come in for a week's residence, no doubt it would be seen flying for many days to come. The harbour looked brighter than ever. Its water sparkled in the sunshine, and white sailed boats flitted to and fro.

We spent most of that morning on the ramparts, gazing upwards and outwards from our coign of vantage. Islands far and near, rising from the waters, looked the very emblem of repose. All the surrounding sea shimmered in the sunshine, until one grew dazzled with the ceaseless flashing. Not least refreshing was the greensward on which we lounged and commanded this little world. White houses with their red roofs came out in picturesque contrast, and reminded one vividly of a Norwegian landscape. We might have been journeying to the North Cape, touching at one or other of the countless settlements at which the boat calls on her way: small islands in the sea or settlements on the mainland; a constant cruising in and out of rocks and land and water; an ever varying scene of simple and primitive life, which gives to this voyage a charm and a variety possessed by few others.

But we were not in Norway. E. would not have admitted it for a moment. Swedes and Norwegians—each to his own. We were not even in Sweden, but in an island of the Cattegat, belonging thereto. And lying idly on the cool greensward of the fortifications, the dignified castle giving a romantic interest to the scene: lying under the broad hot sunshine, life and air and a profound calm absorbed with every breath indrawn: we confessed that it would

be good to stay there for all our leisure time; day after day, doing nothing but revelling in mere existence; turning to a favourite book when tired of watching the clouds and the sea, the bathers and the boaters, the flirters and the sedater couples who, having outlived their youthful emotions, gazed upon the latter with a serene pity that bore witness to the nature of the soft whispers these deluded souls were uttering: the fools' paradise they had made for themselves.

And wherefore not? Youth has the best of it, after all. A fools' paradise is better than no paradise at all. Dreams are better than prosy facts. Castles in the air raise us for a moment into happiness, and when they crumble we must escape the ruins as best we can. To watch imaginary faces in the fire is far pleasanter and more wholesome than to ponder over the cold realities of an empty grate. Therefore, in this life, let us cheat realities by living as much as we can in our imagination; let us have our dreams, our castles in the air, our fools' paradise. Be sure the world will do its best to undeceive us; will prevent us from hugging our phantoms too closely and turning them into idols.

We agreed that it would be good and wise to spend many days here in Marstrand, in a dolce far niente existence above all others life-giving and health-restoring. But it had not entered into our plans to do this; we had other thoughts and prospects in view. Besides: dark days would come, when skies would be overcast, and rain would fall, and Marstrand would plunge one from fields Elysian to the depths of misery. In wet weather, Marstrand, we thought, must be simply intolerable. And to-day there was something so wonderful in the atmosphere, so clear in the air, so brilliant in the sunshine, we asked ourselves if it were possible that a change was not at hand.

So we left the ramparts for the funny little streets, which more than ever seemed without plan or design; now coming unexpectedly upon a clumsy triangular square; now, at the end of a tortuous maze, finding ourselves in a cul-de-sac; at the entrance, perhaps, of a small house, with the option of throwing ourselves from a back window into unknown depths of darkness and mystery, and so escaping back into this world or another: or of returning by the way we came. The latter seemed the wiser plan. Plunges into unexplored depths seldom lead even to a fools' paradise.

We visited the quaint old church, which had some black, interesting wood carving about it, and pictures fearfully and wonderfully drawn, and a small dark sacristy with a few old books, and ancient vestments that, like old lace, were probably all the more valuable for being yellow and dirty. Altogether a handsome church for this little island, dating back to the 15th century. Handsome, no doubt, for that very reason: for Marstrand, like a faded beauty, has had a past; a history warlike and commercial, when it was of greater importance than now seems possible for so small a place. But its

prominent situation explains the mystery, and it has been called the key of the North Sea.

A youthful guide piloted us to St. Eric's Grotto, at the back of the island : a swampy marsh with a great hole in a rock, where the saint was wont to rest, and a group of trees where he walked and meditated.

A Druidical looking spot, that, instead of being on a height, like most Druidical remains, was in a hollow. Even the sea which rolled and surged within a few feet of us was hidden by rising, slippery, barren rocks, which could only be climbed by the Irish method of two steps backward for one forward. There was also a spring here : a deep well, from which our guide drew for our benefit a supply of clear cold water. In days gone by this spring was dedicated to heathen rites —Druidical or other—possibly all banished and put to flight under the dispensation of St. Eric. But of this there is no record, and here again we are at liberty to dream our dreams and draw our own conclusions. It required, indeed, no vivid imagination to picture the saint as he paced these small groves in holy meditation fancy free, missal in hand ; an aged figure and a long grey beard ; a calm eye undimmed by the passions of humanity ; a far away gaze opening to the mysteries of the unseen world. And who shall say that these mystic hermits, with minds prepared by devotion and frames mortified by fasting, were not actually nearer the Unseen than we, who, in all the hubble-bubble of existence, are taken up with the cares and riches and deceitfulness of life?

It was one of our last impressions of Marstrand. Presently the steamer came up that was to bear us away. Everyone seemed to have collected to see it arrive and depart. It came to this remote spot as a breath from the world, and departed as a messenger. The bell rang, gangways were withdrawn, paddles turned, the water splashed and foamed ; we fell away from the landing quay; Marstrand receded. A crowd of pocket handkerchiefs waved : as natural and necessary a token of farewell in these latitudes as a handshake in England. Wherever a train leaves platform or boat its moorings in Sweden, the air becomes white with handkerchiefs frantically agitated until the last remnant of boat or train has passed out of sight of the starting point.

To-day the little crowd was no exception to the rule. White handkerchiefs—and handkerchiefs no longer white—gradually grew faint and indistinct. We passed by the deserted fortress—needed no longer since Marstrand in its decline has ceased to excite the envy of ambitious pirates. Steaming out of the harbour we saw the island no more. Inhabitants and sojourners no doubt went back to their every day life and amusements—one day so like another : and we to Gothenburg returned the way we had come.

Hotter, closer, more enervating than ever seemed Gothenburg after Marstrand. Devoutly we wished for the hour when we might leave

it for ever. Hot and tiring by day, at night yielding neither rest nor quiet. At two o'clock in the morning commenced a procession of carts, which, thundering through the streets with a noise that would have wakened the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, forbade all further repose for anyone but Gothenburg's well-seasoned inhabitants. Throughout Sweden there is something in the construction of houses or streets, or both combined, which makes the sound of anything passing down the thoroughfares so terrific, that one's very nerves jar in concert with the noise, one's ears are in danger of losing all sense of hearing. A learned engineer endeavoured to explain the mystery by showing how in some special way sound was not deadened, at the time of construction, by the ordinary methods. The cause was too technical and

HALMSTAD—SQUARE AND CHURCH.

abstruse for a novice, and remained a mystery: enough that the effect was a great reality. Like a phantom haunting its familiar, it followed one throughout Sweden, not excepting the capital itself.

I had promised to spend a day with friends living south of Gothenburg: a promise made in happy ignorance of the fact that it would entail a twenty-six hours' journey by sea and land, and a night spent at an hotel en route. My friends on their part had no idea that plans would have been formed limiting that visit to twenty-four hours. But having promised, I performed, and did not regret doing so. The only parallel case at this moment recurring to memory is that of a sixteen hours' rough drive once taken in Shetland to pay a morning call.

E. decided to vegetate the while in Gothenburg, and remained behind to revel in sea-bathing, and search out, if any existed, the hidden beauties of the town.

The boat started at eight o'clock, and was due at Halmstad—first stage in my journey—about five in the afternoon. A more perfect day never existed. More beautiful than any that had gone before, it was surely too glorious to last. So indeed it proved. For days and weeks after that, perfection as regarded weather became a remembrance of the past.

All day we steamed down the coast of Sweden. If the shores were flat and uninteresting, the very beauty of sky and sunshine, the extreme rarity of the atmosphere, invested them with a charm the more enjoyed that one felt it due to the uncertain elements. Only too often this Cattegat behaves with utter indifference to the comfort and even life of travellers at its mercy. But to-day it was calm as

HALMSTAD—PRINCIPAL STREET.

it oil had been thrown upon its frequently troubled surface. Every small object on land or sea was reflected as in a mirror. The sun beamed upon the waters in great patches of light; poured down upon the deck as if it would set all ablaze. Scarcely a breath of air stirred, beyond the slight currents of our own motion. Our little boat was called the "Mermaid," and, thanks to the calm sea, no mermaid was ever found in kindlier mood.

We steamed quietly onwards until towards midday. Then rounding a point, we turned into the quaint little harbour of Warburg, and there discharged a few passengers and a goodly cargo. It was evidently a small sea-bathing place, pleasant and quiet. In and about a casino built of wood, cool looking and quite fashionable and worldly, a few visitors lounged and idled, while listening to the strains of a band. Go where you will in Sweden, you will find an orchestra; good, bad, or indifferent. Apparently the Swedes will have music,

though it is so often not of the best. On the heights of Warburg reposed an old castle, for some reason fallen from its high estate, and degraded to the level of a House of Correction.

After about an hour's stay, scorched, almost melted, by the sun, we steamed again into broad waters. Dinner had been laid on deck, and nothing could be more charming under the sky's blue canopy. The vessel glided along without motion. In the foreground were low, green shores, mile after mile apparently deserted; given over to the gulls and whosoever might choose to make there for himself a local habitation. To all seeming, none would dispute his right. Only at wide intervals was there sign or token of life, and then it disclosed itself far inland in the shape of a small village, or settlement, with perhaps a church spire pointing upwards from out the waving trees. In its trees, Sweden has certainly the advantage over Norway. They are beautiful and well grown, and of many kinds.

But we wanted no variety this morning in our passage down the Cattegat. People and their habitations were matters of indifference. We had grander and nobler objects to contemplate. The ever-rolling sea upon the beach. Long stretches of glistening sand on which the tide broke with soothing murmurs. White shores backed by green slopes and reaches, immense extents of barren, heathlike ground, giving place occasionally to less wild, more cultivated undulations. Again, there were rocks: not high and frowning, not the haunts and homes of the wild bird: but low and polished by the action of countless ages of receding and advancing tides. To-day the water lapped gently round them, plashing and caressing, and retiring without even the energy to break into spray. But more often than not the angry Cattegat lashes itself into fury and beats and breaks upon the shores. In such a mood you will see little beauty in her, nothing attractive in land and sky. For the motion of the angry Cattegat is peculiarly restless, and few withstand her influence.

About five o'clock we passed up the Nissa to Halmstad—a fine stream, with long reaches on either side, forming a sort of natural harbour and breakwater; possessing—said the pleasant captain of the *Mermaid*—excellent salmon fishing. The town opened up, and we were soon alongside the quay: a broad thoroughfare stretching upwards beyond the bridge. All journeying was over for the present. The afternoon train had left, and I must be content with such attractions as Halmstad offered, until about seven o'clock the next morning.

These attractions were modest enough. A less exciting town could scarcely exist, as it appeared that evening. The streets were uninteresting, almost deserted. Yet it is a town of considerable population, and has a flourishing trade in the way of corn and timber. It is a seaport, and has a railway station: a conjunction of privileges certain to be utilised in Sweden to the utmost. There were no shops to speak of, or rather none worth looking at,

and Herr Öster, the landlord of the hotel—Märtensn's—was unable to relieve the monotony of existence by speaking a single word of any other language than his own. The inn, with no pretence to anything beyond simplicity, was quiet and comfortable. Yet even here the march of progress has set its seal, and living is twice as expensive in Halmstad as it was ten years ago.

The pleasantest and prettiest part of the town was that bordering the river. Here, if you pleased, you might take an oar or paddle your own canoe, and, running up beside the Tivoli Gardens, listen to the band. This Tivoli is the rendezvous of the town, where, of an evening, people meet and repose on benches or stroll about, talk and enjoy music, all in a very unemotional, matter-of-fact sort of way. Tivoli was on rising ground, and from the brow of the hill, where you found yourself on a level with the orchestra, you had a view beyond of a small lake, which seemed the termination of the Nissa, and a large white house, reposing in park-like grounds and embowered in spreading trees.

Within a few yards of Tivoli, its little crowd and sweet strains, is the one antiquity of the town: an old gateway, massive and not beautiful, but still worthy of the honour due to great age. Some time ago a barbarous town-council decided that it only cumbered the ground and must be removed; but the inhabitants rose in a body with such determination that the council, in terror for their very lives, reversed their decision, and the gateway was saved. It is seen from far down the principal street, and gives it a quaint interest and a distinctive character.

The next morning arrived almost sooner than it was welcome. At six o'clock a watchful attendant appeared with a long, unintelligible sentence, evidently having one end and aim: to proclaim the fact that trains and tide wait for no man. But this is not quite the case in Sweden. Trains do wait beyond their time, and will even put back for anyone who may be seen struggling up a road, or frantically waving a red cotton umbrella from a distressed vehicle.

This morning it started punctually: a short train, with about three carriages and half a dozen passengers.

It was a tedious journey of about four hours, and a distance, I think, of about fifty miles. Stoppages were endless, waste of time deplorable, considering the rapidity of the age. How is it possible to realise the days of our grandfathers, who travelled by coach, and thought as much of a journey of two hundred miles as one now thinks of going round the world? They prepared for such a journey by making their wills and setting their houses in order; but who dreams of making his will on taking a trip even through the North West Passage? They must also have possessed largely another quality, those forefathers of ours—that virtue of Patience, which seems to be dying out in this nineteenth century, and will probably expire altogether in the twentieth.

It was also a somewhat monotonous journey, leading upwards through the valley of the Nissa. Yet, at times, it was very pretty. Hills, covered with fir trees, broad undulations, long stretches of green fields, giving place to thick, dark-looking forests, where wild flowers grew, and abundant strawberries—those wild strawberries that are more plentiful in Sweden than blackberries in our hedges, and that, mixed with cream and sugar, are worth a king's ransom. Beside us the river ran, appearing and disappearing in its windings; now so shallow that its rocky bed was laid bare, and again deepening where the banks narrowed. Occasionally these banks were adorned with a profusion of wild flowers and ferns. If communication with the engine-driver had been possible, he would no doubt have drawn up to

HALMSTAD.

allow one to gather them, and pluck the little red strawberries that cried out to be eaten. I do not think any of the passengers would have objected, or shown surprise. The Swedes are slow at taking in a fact, and very slow at putting themselves out of the way.

At last our station. The long, slow journey was over. On the platform a kindly face to bid us welcome. Fortunately: for the station had apparently no name, and no guard or porter attempted to supply the deficiency. One might have travelled for another four hours, wondering whether the end of the world and the station would come together.

"You have really arrived," said a pleasant English voice—and how pleasant a ring it has in a foreign country. "But you need not hurry—the train itself is not in a hurry. These slow trains never are."

It was a delightful change to the carriage that waited for us; and we now seemed to bowl along the road more quickly than the train had run upon the lines.

We appeared to be in the heart of Sweden; as remote from civilisation as the wilds of Australia. Not a house to be seen anywhere; no sign of life. We were driving through an apparently endless extent of forest—fir trees, and nothing but fir trees. The sensation was inexpressibly delicious. This indeed, was forest life; life of the forest primeval.

"I am sorry you have to go back so soon," said T. hospitably, as

HALMSTAD—HARBOUR AND QUAY.

I expressed delight at all this silence and solitude—this endless forest drive. "You have taken a long journey for a very small return."

"It is worth it all," was the only possible answer. "This is, indeed, glorious. Your lives must be passed amidst all that is beautiful and inspiring in nature. You ought, every one of you, to be perfect."

"I don't know," said T. quaintly. "It is very well for you, who come from the outer world, glad of rest and change, and contrast. But if you lived here all the year round, I think you would sometimes have more than enough of it. The solitude would become appalling; and the grandeur, having grown familiar, would cease to charm."

"That seems impossible. The more you see of this, the more it must be loved."

"You are a born lover of the country," returned T., "and delight in all her moods and variations: and that they are delightful I quite admit. But can you imagine what it is to be shut up here for a whole winter; no neighbours with whom to exchange ideas; nature all dead around you; no singing birds or flowers; snow and ice and a searching cold that never lifts, day after day, and week after week? You would not like that."

"One can only imagine what is seen ——"

"You only wish to imagine it," interrupted T. with a laugh. "But I think your reason goes with me."

"Let the truth of your argument be proved before it is admitted."

"Then it will never be admitted, for you will never try it," said T. "You could never stand it. At the end of a month you would fly back to the world, vowing that country life, and forest solitudes, and the whole catalogue of country charms were mere phantoms of the brain; delusions to be kept for short honeymoons, or referred back to Adam and Eve in Paradise."

"Impossible," I persisted. "This is one of the greatest pleasures anyone could experience. To be driving, as we are now, through all these forest beauties; mile after mile, passing through forest after forest, and feel that it is all your own; that you are free to destroy or to build up, and no one can let or hinder you; that all this solitude is yours to enjoy for ever, and cannot be intruded upon or broken without permission—this ought to make you feel happy as kings."

"Perhaps more so," laughed T. "If we are to believe our school-books, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' My head is never uneasy."

"Nor your heart," I returned, "or that laugh belies itself. You are rejoicing in the freshness and freedom of your twenty summers.—Have you ever walked from one end to the other of your property?"

"Never at one time," answered T. "It is very large. But then," he modestly added, "Sweden is not England."

Fir cones crunched beneath our wheels, squirrels ran from tree to tree, great birds flew over our heads, wondering who thus disturbed their solitude; trees took fantastic forms and shapes. Now an old trunk with withered branches looked like some forest gnome crouching from unseen evil, and now another uprose like a tall spectre with outstretched arms working spells and incantations.

At length a long, low house covering a great extent of ground came into view. A house peculiar to Sweden, almost peculiar to itself. It was only one storey high. A portico many yards wide, was supported by pillars. Round the doorway many English faces were assembled; English voices gave welcome.

It was a lonely spot, yet, like the rest of the drive, wild and solitary. One felt perfectly out of the world; as much so as anyone could feel in mid-ocean. There was no daily postman, and all letters had to be taken to and from the train. Flowers and trees surrounded the

house. Not far away was a lake with any amount of boating at command. Tall reeds and rushes bent and waved to the passing breeze. Beyond it long stretches of country; cultivated fields yielding corn and hay crops, in apparently endless extent. The distance was bounded by immense forests, where it seemed that timber might be felled yet never missed. Not far from the house, but out of sight, was an immense kitchen garden with unlimited strawberry beds; and presently a dish was placed upon the dessert table that would almost have supplied a small town. Near the strawberry garden was the ice-house, partly underground, with a sufficient supply for all possible needs the whole year round.

What could be more delightful than to explore this far away settlement? There was all the freshness of a new feeling about it, of absolute freedom. You might be as eccentric and unconventional as you pleased, no censorious world would remark thereon. You lived and breathed the pure air of heaven. The world had grown wider, mind and soul expanded with it. Town life, its limits and contractions, conventionalities and stiffness, forms and ceremonies, next door neighbours and opposite windows—all this was shaken off and dismissed, and fell from one as might fall the chains of slavery. Hereditary bondsmen are they who live in great cities.

Here was the truer life. A sky above, high and wide and blue; laughing sunshine that glinted through swaying trees and cast long shadows in the avenues, and invited one to live almost in the open air. Endless walks through field and forest. Here and there a few cottages where dwelt your dependents and farm labourers, who lived only to obey your will and till your ground. In early morning or the cool of evening, taking boat and idly paddling about the lake, watching the changes in the broad sky, the colours deepening as the sun dipped. Watching the gold-tipped trees changing to darkness, like a dying life, and gloom spreading itself over nature; and the depths of the forest turning from the cool shades of day to the melancholy of profound night. Over all, unbroken solitude; not even a far-off glimmer flashing from any window to mark the existence of other lives and domestic dramas in this solitary Eden, this boundless, charming wilderness.

"Neighbours? We may indeed say that we have none, as the word is understood in England," said my hostess. "Our only neighbour is Baron R——, and he is seven miles away. Rather a long drive for a morning call, and so our calls usually last several days. We go over and stay with them, and they come and stay with us. Even this is a delightful break in our monotonous existence. If it were not for books and letters, and the feeling that there is an outer world and that we have friends in it, who, after all, are accessible at any moment we choose to undertake a journey: if it were not for this, I think we should die of stagnation."

It was difficult to be convinced. The advantages of the world

were infinitely outweighed by all this freedom, these wild beauties, these forest sights and sounds, this sense of possession. Then there was the possibility of filling the house with friends—by far the most real of all social happiness and enjoyment.

"In summer, yes," said my hostess. "But our summers are short, our winters long. Who would stay a whole winter here? And it is worse for us ladies of the family than for the gentlemen. They may go out skating, sleighing, shooting; take long excursions; go off bear hunting, and so relieve for days together the monotony of perpetual ice and snow. We ladies must be content with skating and sleighing within limited areas. We simply vary the monotony of our winter, do not relieve it."

We were walking through a pine avenue. On the one hand was a wood leading apparently to charming depths abounding in tangle and wild flowers and ferns; on the other the lake opened out with broad fields beyond, ending in distant forests. Presently a labourer approached, and was stopped by the ladies. His expression was sad and troubled, and he had some difficulty to speak without losing self-control.

"Poor fellow," said my hostess, after he had passed on, with marks of sympathy and words of consolation; "he has just lost his only boy, a lovely little fellow of five. He took measles and was badly treated. Generally speaking, in illness of any sort, they come up to the house, but he did not do so until it was too late. Their ideas of nursing are primitive. Their manner of keeping a patient warm is to smother him in blankets, close all doors and windows, and shut out every breath of air that could possibly help to restore him. If he recovers after this, it is thanks to a vigorous constitution which will not allow him to die."

"The poor fellow seems overwhelmed with his loss," I remarked.

"He is so," replied my hostess. "He was very fond of his boy, and was a good father. He has only one girl left now, three years of age, and so the child's loss will make a great gap in the household."

"Are parents here good to their children?" I asked. "Are the households happy?"

"Yes, as a rule. But the people are simple, and their ideas are very elementary. They have few temptations in these out of the world districts; no public-houses to entice them from home and absorb their wages. But as mere labourers the men are sometimes troublesome. And, of course, they are frightful radicals; not so much politically—they are hardly up to that—as socially."

Not least interesting amongst our explorations were the visits to the surrounding buildings, out of sight of the house yet within a small radius. Immense stables; great barns filled with hay; granaries holding corn; long cow-houses with endless stalls; great saw mills, smelling of turpentine, where you might bury yourself in sawdust and revel in the swish-swish of the saw; a corn-mill with immense rollers

that ground the wheat into flour. The wheel was turned by a stream whose waters could be let loose at pleasure.

"A great place for rats," said T. "I have often wished to come across some of them, but have never done so."

As he spoke we heard a skirmish and scamper on the floor above, and immediately after, two enormous rats came gambolling down the stairs, apparently as astonished at our appearance as we were at theirs. They prepared for a precipitate retreat, but luckily we both carried a stick, and while T. despatched the one, I was successful with the other. They were monsters indeed.

"These, at any rate, have taken their last toll of our corn," said T. laughing. "To judge by their size, the toll has not been a small one. The granaries are infested with them, and would be, I believe, if we kept a whole army of cats."

The stream received the dead bodies, accorded no worthier burial, and we went our way, extending our walk through endless fields, and looking at the grazing cattle—cows with their meek and mild eyes; horses turned into a meadow, and wild in the enjoyment of space and liberty.

"How many horses have you?" I asked of T.

"About a hundred and twenty," he answered. "So you see we want plenty of food for them; great barns for the hay, and granaries for the corn. Besides that, we have an unlimited number of cows."

"True. And they must have good hay if they are to give good milk in return. What is the old saying? 'Feed a sheep with grass and it repays you in wool.'"

"One of the connecting links running through all creation," said T. rather dreamily. "We depend upon each other. 'All things in one another mingle,' does not Shelley say; 'the fountain with the river, and the river with the ocean.' So the world goes round, and thus mankind manages to make both ends meet."

The sun went down all too soon that day, and twilight with its mysterious shadows fell upon the earth. Breeze rustled and murmured in the tree tops, and bent and swayed them as if uttering majestic sentiments to which they were calmly assenting. Voices seemed to come from out the depths of the forest, which spoke to one's soul and thrilled one's very being: voices weighted with the solemn mysteries of the unknown and the unrevealed. Darkness fell and shut out the world. It was nothing now but one great abyss of blackness, sad, melancholy, awe-inspiring. But above, that dark blue vault had taken up the tale, and with its own voice declared the mysteries of creation. Stars flashed and scintillated—countless worlds fulfilling their destiny. An eternity of space, demanding an eternity to traverse, teeming with worlds known and unknown to us, seen and unseen; peopled with possibly a higher order of being than ourselves, going through more stupendous tragedies. And yet:

"He holdeth them all in the hollow of His hand, and calleth the stars by their names."

And if night came all too soon, so did the hour of final separation. The next morning, after breakfast, it was necessary to be on the wing. The horses came round, farewells were said, and we started once more for our splendid drive to the station. Mile after mile through overshadowing forests and endless solitudes. As a flash the visit had passed, and perhaps for that reason its impression was all the more vivid. It certainly left behind it a vision of calm and sylvan retreats, where life passes almost as it might have passed in primeval ages; far from the haunts of man, the rush and roar of towns, the disquieting elements of crowds, the unsatisfying illusions of society. An Arcadian existence, filled with delights, where nerves were braced, overstrained temperaments waxed serene, the heart grew light, happiness abounded, and care was only an essence and a name.

Then came the station. Afar off was the train steaming up that was to bear one away from it all. But the station-master was not forthcoming, and tickets were not to be had—so primitive is life here. However, he was approaching in that very train, and T. undertook to get a ticket whilst I settled down. This was an express train, and there would be rather less loitering at the stations than there had been yesterday. Yet we had time enough and to spare for all that was needed. A last good-bye, the whistle sounded, the train moved on. Away to the world again, whilst T. turned back to his happy Arcadian existence.

Halmstad once more. And when, about four o'clock, I went down to watch the arrival of the boat from Gothenburg, whose face should I see on board but E.'s. Tired of his solitary life, he had taken steamer for Halmstad, and, in spite of the treacheries of the Cattegat, had arrived safe and sound. For six hours we explored together the unexciting, uninteresting town, listened to the band, studied the inhabitants. Nothing particularly original rewarded us; no great eccentricities, or startling beauties, or anything far removed from the commonplace. At ten o'clock we were on board again, and the steamer started for Gothenburg.

But the Cattegat, no longer in a good humour, had lashed itself into fury. The vessel pitched and tossed like a cork upon the waves. Everything not fastened went flying in all directions. It was a terrible night, and at eight o'clock the next morning we put into Gothenburg with feelings of rejoicing. For once we felt quite an affection for the old place, and looked upon Hauglund's as a harbour of refuge.

Not long should we remain at anchor. This was Sunday, and on Monday morning at mid-day, having duly taken our berths and paid our passage, we bade a cheerful farewell to Gothenburg, and started up the Gotha Canal, en route for Stockholm.

VALENTINA.

I.

IT was a sleepy little village; an off-shoot of the bigger village (which was almost a town) two miles off; and the big village held up its head as if it were a city, and was bustling and imposing, and did not condescend to take notice of its humble neighbour. The one was known as High Marten; the other as Little Marten, an appropriate appellation befitting its obscurity. Its dwellings were chiefly cottages, standing in little plots of garden ground.

Right in the middle of the village, however, which consisted of one long, straight street, there was quite a sumptuous terrace of five houses, six rooms in each of them. And it must be observed that it is of Little Marten we are writing; the grander place is beyond our pen.

The middle house of this terrace had flowers on the outer sill of its parlour window, and a card hung up inside, on which was inscribed in round text-hand: "Miss Kettaway and Sister, Fashionable Milliners and Dressmakers"—the friendly composition and writing of the village schoolmaster. Miss Kettaway and Miss Miranda Kettaway had plenty of custom; they were accommodating ladies, and did not disdain to make homely gowns and poke bonnets as well as fashionable ones. Miss Kettaway would probably never see forty-five again; if asked her age, she might have said "thirty-three;" Miss Miranda was ten years younger, and fully meant to get married as soon as anybody asked her.

Precisely opposite this mart of fashion, on the other side the way, stood a curious kind of abode surrounded by an outhouse or two, a poultry yard, and a productive garden with a small pond in it. It might have been taken for a cabin or a bungalow, since it was only one story high; and its three rooms opened into one another. This place belonged to Jessy Moon; and she had lived in it alone since her father and mother died.

"Which is venturesome of her," Miss Kettaway remarked one day to her sister. "Girls ought not to live all alone in outlandish places no better than barns, with only a door to protect them; it's not safe or prudent."

"Girls?" disputed Miss Miranda. "You may call Jessy Moon a girl, Susan, but *I* don't. She's hard upon thirty if she's a day."

"She'll be six-and-twenty, come Midsummer," said Miss Susan calmly, biting off an end of thread. "But she ought to have let the place when her mother died, and taken a lodging-room."

It was a boisterous day in spring, and the windows of the cabin shook and rattled as though Jessy Moon were cleaning them. But Jessy was a mile off on her way to High Marten, her head bent

against the biting, resolute gale, her grey cloak flying out behind her like a banner. She carried a flat basket covered with a cloth, eggs lay in it and some little posies of sweet, simple, homely flowers: polyanthuses and gillyflowers from her garden beds; or primroses, cowslips, and bluebells from the wood which skirted the garden at the back. Later on she would have flowers of more importance: small tulips, daffodils, button roses, lilies of the valley, columbines, bachelors' buttons, pinks, and so on. They were put up artistically, these little nosegays, with a little white paper round their stems. Jessy was taking them and the eggs into High Marten to her customers there, as she did two or three times a week. She did not disdain any honest way of getting a living; she had but ten pounds a year certain, all told.

Her mother had been servant in a good family for many years; at her master's death she was rewarded with money, which, when invested, brought her in ten pounds yearly. She then married a fellow-servant, the head gardener, James Moon, who had also received a substantial legacy. He bought the low cabin house in the parish of Little Marten, and there Jessy had grown up. Moon took another situation, in which he earned good wages; the wife kept the house in order, and attended to their little girl. They had married late in life, and when they died Jessy was twenty-five years old. The cabin was her own and ten pounds a year, and she did her best to augment the little income so that she might remain in her home.

"It is four shillings a week," Jessy mentally calculated. "Enough to buy bread with; there are potatoes and other things in the garden, and I might boil an egg for myself now and then. Yes, I think I might manage even that way; but I mean to try to do better."

So she kept poultry and sold her eggs; and she made up the posies and found a ready sale for them; and she did fine embroidery for a shop at High Marten, and altogether was getting quietly and comfortably along.

The door of the house opened to the living room, or kitchen. That opened to a better room, which was called the parlour, and the parlour again to Jessy's bedroom. In the kitchen, on this windy day, sat a green parrot on her perch, swearing—or what sounded uncommonly like it—at the rattling windows. Its green plumage was emerald bright, the tuft on the head a glowing scarlet. A good-hearted old lady down in the village had recently made a present of this parrot to Jessy. "She's such a talker as you never heard, my dear; quite a wonderful talker; and I give her to you that you may sell her to anybody who falls in love with her; you ought not to let her go under a pound; and her name's Valentina." The truth being that the old lady, who had recently taken to attend a strict Baptist chapel, could no longer put up with Valentina's loose language.

If by chance the minister paid her a visit, that ill-conditioned bird was sure to seize on the occasion to scandalise his ears.

Valentina sat on her perch in the cabin, twisting herself this way and that, and quarrelling with the windows, when there came a modest knock at the outer door. She turned her head in the act of listening, not being quite sure perhaps whether it was the door or not. The knock was repeated more loudly.

"Who's there, who's there?" called out Valentina. "Come in and take a chair."

Whereupon the visitor naturally tried the latch. But the door was locked, and the key was in Jessy's pocket on its way to High Marten. The wind was making such an uproar, inside and out, that the applicant could only catch the sound of the words imperfectly, and never thought of the parrot.

"Oh, come in, come in; don't stand waiting in the cold; you'll catch your death," repeated Valentina.

Upon that, the door latch rattled again more violently; at which Valentina laughed until she lost her hold upon the perch, and fluttered down to the floor.

"Oh dear, I shall die! I shall die! Come in; come in, and take a chair," she called out, laughing again in her idiotic fashion, as she climbed back.

At this insult, the person outside, having found her out, walked away in anger, after asking Valentina through the keyhole whether she would like her neck wrung; for he was in a hurry and had no time to waste.

"Hang the men! they're all alike; don't trust 'em," fired off Valentina as a parting shot; though indeed a fanciful hearer might have said the first word did not sound altogether like "hang."

At that moment Miss Miranda Kettaway chanced to look out at her window opposite. She saw a light spring-cart drawn up; its white cover on it to-day, to shield from the wind the plants in pots and the choice vegetables it contained, and she saw its master turning away from his fruitless call at the cabin door. He was a very tall, fine man, with a healthy, pleasant face, and bright brown eyes.

"Susan! Susan! Do come here! There's Adam Drake calling there again! What can it possibly mean?—What can he want? This is the third time in a fortnight!"

"Calling where?" placidly responded Miss Kettaway, her mouth too full of pins to stir from her chair.

"Why at Jessy Moon's. He has got into his cart now and is driving off. What on earth Drake the Carrier can want there is odd to me. Three times in a——"

"Bother Drake the Carrier!" sensibly interrupted Miss Susan. "Don't you see I am waiting for you to measure this skirt with me, Miranda?"

Adam Drake was popularly known as Drake the Carrier. Further

up the road, beyond the village, were some nursery grounds, and upon them a great big glass hot-house filled with rare flowers, and also a compact, pretty dwelling-house. It was all the property of Adam Drake. He had gone out when a little boy to help to weed in a gentleman's garden under the head gardener, James Moon, and by dint of unflagging industry and good conduct had worked his way up in the world—which is the very best way of all ways to get up in it. He did a good trade with High Marten in his hot-house flowers, and took in every morning to the hotel there, and to one or two of the rich families, some of his fruit and choice vegetables; bringing back in his empty cart parcels for Little Marten if anyone wanted to send them. It had grown into quite a carrying trade long ago, and he had earned the soubriquet of Drake the Carrier.

Thus Adam Drake, now about six-and-thirty, was prospering in life. He was a genial, kindly-natured man, always ready to do a good turn. Many a little basket of strawberries or nectarines had he taken to the room of one who was sick and poor, many a plate of fresh green peas. Early and late he was at his work at home; and now that he could keep a man or two to help him, he did not himself often go with the cart to High Marten. When he did go he delivered the pots and the peas on his way there, and the parcels coming back, with his own good hands, just as though he had not a halfpenny in the bank. All the world liked Adam Drake. The women reproached him for not getting married, asking if he meant to grow into an old bachelor. Drake answered them that he had no time to think of a wife; and the men, with intense earnestness, said, "So much the better."

Now it was at Adam Drake that Miss Miranda was privately setting her cap. And to this end she invented no end of commissions for High Marten; parcels, small or large, which he had to bring back and deliver. When the deliverer was himself, Miss Miranda took care to be the recipient in person.

Meanwhile the wind, which rattled the casements on this fine spring day and fluttered the grey cloak, was bringing a change as the hours went on; the weather from fine became comfortless. Snowflakes began to whirl down from the sky, and speedily whitened the road and the tender young grass; and when Jessy got back home her cloak was white too. As she put the key into the door, Valentina called out her welcome.

"Come in, come in! Here you are, take a chair. Give a nut to Valentina."

Valentina meant a biscuit; but she called all good things nuts. Jessy took no notice of her as yet. She carefully put down her basket, stamped the snow off her shoes, took off her cloak and shook it, shook her bonnet, and then set light to the stove. It was a small stove, with a cheerful, open fire.

"Yes, I hear you," said Jessy, for Valentina did not cease her demands. "You must wait a bit, my bird."

Bustling about, she put the room into order. In her basket she had brought home some ducks' eggs to put under one of her hens that wanted to sit; and she hastened out to lay them in the nest, for she knew that ducks' eggs are apt to take a chill and be none the better for it. Coming back she gave Valentina a lump of sugar, and then laid the cloth for her own tea—tea and dinner in one.

She drew the round table near the stove and spread the white cloth upon it; and set out the tea-pot and a cup and saucer, some bread, butter, and a small piece of cold boiled beef. It was done quickly and dexterously, as though she were a fairy elf. She did not look unlike one, for she was very small and slight and graceful, and her face was fair, and her eyes were blue with a kindly look in them.

Valentina was treated to some sop; bread and water, well sweetened. The old lady had been used to feed her on it, and Jessy did the same.

"Not sweet! Not sweet! More sugar for Valentina."

Jessy laughed, and sprinkled a bit more; it was the usual routine when the parrot was fed. Then she sat down to her own meal.

Tea over, she hastened to clear it all away, washed her hands, and sat down to her embroidery.

A light vehicle was heard to stop outside, and a man's steps approached the door, which was then knocked at. Valentina shrieked out:

"Oh, come in, come in! Why don't you come in? Walk in and take a chair."

The door briskly opened; it was not locked now; and Drake the Carrier entered. Jessy folded her work within its tissue paper and stood up.

"Fine man! Fine man! Take a chair now."

This from Valentina. Jessy blushed rosy red, fearing Mr. Drake should think the phrase "fine man" had been caught from herself.

"I came here this morning, but the door was locked," said he. "That chattering parrot called out to me to come in, and I thought it was you. Misleading creature! I wonder you put up with her."

"I have got used to her now," said Jessy; "and she makes the house seem less lonely."

"It *is* lonely for you here, Miss Jessy, just yourself and the four walls. Why I, up to my place, feel lonely at times, though mostly I've too much to do to think about it."

"And you have Ann Seabright to keep you company."

"Ann Seabright! Much company Ann is, poor old thing. She'll be eighty, come next winter, and the work of the house has got beyond her; takes her as many hours to tidy up the kitchen as it would a younger one minutes. She began crying yesterday and said she should have to give up."

"I am sorry for that. Won't you sit down, Mr. Drake?"

"Thankye! I haven't got time; the cart's outside. I called in this

morning to ask if I could take your basket to High Marten for you this boisterous day. And I wanted to ask whether——"

Up to that, Adam Drake had spoken pretty quickly, but now he came to a dead stand. If it was possible for a tall, strong man, who went about the world and drove daily to High Marten and back, to look sheepish, one might have thought he did just then.

"Yes," said Jessy.

"Well, it's this," said he, plucking up courage. "Ann Seabright, talking of you, said she believed you'd like to get a little plain work to do now and then—trick and turn about with your fine work, she said. She can't see well enough for it now herself; her eyes are past it."

"Yes," repeated Jessy. "I should be glad to get some."

"It's my new—shirts," said the carrier, bringing out the word gingerly.

"Oh," returned Jessy, blushing.

"I bought the stuff ever so long ago and gave it over to Ann. 'Are they made yet?' I asked her this morning. 'Master, they're not so much as cut out. I'm afraid to tackle the cloth, for fear of spoiling it; my old eyes won't let me,' she made answer; and then she went on to say she thought you might accept the job."

"Thank you; they will be just the thing to do at night. I dare not trust embroidery to candle-light. Will you send the cloth to me, Mr. Drake, and the pattern shirt?"

"I will," said he; "it shall come to-morrow. And I'm very much obliged to you indeed, Miss Jessy."

Valentina had kept up a running fire of screams all the while; he was a fine man, a fine man, asking him to take a chair, telling him once or twice he was a "young devil." Adam Drake gave her a flick as he turned to leave.

"I'm not sure but you are a she-devil yourself," cried he. At which reproach the parrot screamed and fluttered and fell off her perch in a tantrum.

"Hang the men! They're all alike; don't trust 'em!"

The departing visitor, standing with the door in his hand, received this parting fling without notice. He seemed to want to speak again.

"I should like to say, Miss Jessy," he breathed forth at last in a timid tone, "that the price to be paid for them shirts will be whatever you like to ask; not the miserable price paid by the shops. I should be ashamed of it."

The good feeling prompting the words touched Jessy's heart; she almost felt tears rising to her eyes.

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Drake, to say so."

"Not at all. I like to hold to the motto, 'Live and let live.' Good-day. I hope we are not in for a fall of snow; it's too late in the season for it."

And in another minute she heard the light spring-cart drive away.

The face of Miss Miranda Kettaway opposite was glued to the window. Miss Susan had twice over told her she was waiting for that sleeve she was basting; but she did not move.

"He's come out at last!" she cried, drawing an angry breath. "What on earth has he been doing there?"

Had Miss Miranda heard that his errand had been "shirts" she might have swooned.

II.

The cloth was brought to Jessy by Ann Seabright, together with the pattern, and an immense amount of intricate instruction from her own lips.

"I'm past fine work myself," said Ann, "and I shouldn't like to trust my fingers with the cutting out; but I've not forgotten how good shirts ought to be made; and be sure you take care to allow plenty everywhere for the turnings-in, Miss Moon; leave a good margin at the gussets; I'm not going to see him cramped in the arm-holes."

Of course it was only natural that during the process of making these essential garments their future wearer should call in to see how they were getting on. The Miss Kettaways, sitting at their window to take a short rest between the lights of an evening, saw him go in pretty often, and made comments accordingly.

"The question is—what does he want there?" asked Miss Miranda. "She must be a forward creature not to shut her door against him; a handsome man, and all."

"Well he does seem to go pretty regular, and it can't be for nothing," allowed Miss Susan, who was never ill-natured. "I'll step over one of these odd days and warn her that folks may get talking if she doesn't mind; she's inexperienced, you see." But the odd day never came; the sisters just then were much "drove," as they expressed it, with the new spring costumes.

One fine morning, when the air was warm and the skies were blue, Jessy Moon put Valentina and her stand outside the door, to get the benefit of the sunshine. The window of the work-room opposite was open; thus the ladies, stitching away behind it, had their ears regaled with the conversation of that sociable bird.

"Warm day! Valentina wants a nut. Good morning. How's Jessy? Fine man, Drake; very fine man!"

"*Did* you hear that, Susan?" whispered Miss Miranda, sticking her needle for safety into the green body in process, and bending forward to listen further.

"Fine man, Drake; very fine man. Come in; come in and take a chair."

"There it is again! The same words; all about Drake," shivered Miss Miranda.

"The men are all alike; don't trust 'em."

Just then a boy, passing along with a basket, stopped to call Valentina a hot-brick and a salamander, and other refreshing names.

"A young devil, a young devil, a young devil!" promptly responded Valentina, and set on to screech and scream and shake her scarlet tuft. Miss Miranda shut the window with a vigorous hand.

"If she is not particular about her own conduct, she might at least not offend us with the ravings of that disreputable animal. I shall go over myself, Susan, as you don't go, and tell her so."

Accordingly, when dusk came on and she had a few minutes' leisure, Miss Miranda put on her gloves and a cape, and stepped across the road. The parrot had been taken in then, and the door was shut.

"Walk in, walk in and take a chair," called out that officious bird in answer to the knock.

Jessy, who had already lighted her candle and was at work, rose and opened the door.

"Miss Miranda, is it you?" she exclaimed, pleasantly. "Do come in; for so near a neighbour you make yourself quite a stranger."

"I have but little time for making calls," said Miss Miranda, loftily, accepting the seat at the little round table opposite Jessy. "Indeed I came over to-night upon what you may think is hardly a friendly errand. It is—to begin with—about that—that—unpleasant parrot," she continued, having hesitated to find an epithet not too strong, and she gave the bird a flick with her parasol, which she had carried over for gentility, not for use.

"Meddlesome old maid! meddlesome old maid!" cried out Valentina.

"We think, I and Susan, that you ought not to harbour the offensive animal, Jessy Moon. She was calling people devils, and such-like swearing, outside to-day. To polite ears it is unbearable."

"Well, I am in hopes of selling her," said Jessy, "but ——

"Wretched old maid!" screamed out Valentina.

"But Mr. Drake—it is he who thinks he has found a customer—says his friend won't be able to take her for a week or two."

"Carrier Drake—oh!" commented Miss Miranda.

"And truly I did not feel sorry to hear it; for you cannot think what company that parrot is to me," said Jessy, who had taken up her work again. "The evening hours, all by myself here, are very lonely."

"Work is always a companion," snapped Miss Miranda. "What is that you are doing? It looks like a shirt wristband."

"It is one; I am stitching it," said Jessy. "It belongs to a set of shirts which I am making."

"Who are they for?"

"Mr. Drake."

Miss Miranda strangled a virtuous cough. "Do you try them on him?" she asked, grimly.

"The wristbands, do you mean? Oh, no."

"I did not mean the wristbands; I meant the—sleeves." For she hardly liked to say the shirts, which had been the word on the tip of her tongue, the young woman looked so open and good.

"Good gracious, no. Why I could hardly stretch up to the top of his arm," laughed Jessy. "One does not need to try shirts on, Miss Miranda, as you do gowns. Ann Seabright brought me a pattern; I only had to measure it."

"It's come to a pretty pass with Ann Seabright, I should say, if she has to put her master's making and mending out."

"Old maid! Wretched old maid!" croaked Valentina.

"She is too old to see to do it," said Jessy. "It was she who asked him to let me do them."

"I should recommend you to be cautious, Jessy Moon. What, with receiving men-visitors, and now taking in these—these shirts for one of them, people will ——"

"Meddlesome old maid, meddlesome old maid, meddlesome old maid!" broke out Valentina in a succession of shrieks. "Hang the men, my dear; don't trust 'em."

It was getting more than Miss Miranda's temper could stand. "Miserable infidel!" she retorted, viciously shaking her fringed parasol at the offender. "Good evening to you, Jessy Moon. I had always known parrots to be low birds, but was not aware until now that they were limbs of the Evil One." And, without shaking hands, Miss Miranda made good her escape.

"Oh, Susan, such disgraceful things as I've got to tell you!" she cried, bursting into their parlour. But her voice suddenly calmed down, for she saw Miss Jones, the schoolmistress, standing there, having her measure taken.

Miss Jones was going to be married, and had come to order her wedding gown. She and little Peterson, the chemist and druggist, had been engaged for hopeless ages, and believed they saw their way to venture into housekeeping at last.

"What's the dress to be?" asked Miss Miranda, Valentina and her insults giving place to this new interest.

"I did think of purple lutestring, but your sister here advises cinnamon brown," replied Miss Jones. "Cinnamon is a good wearing colour, as she says, and I know George Peterson likes brown when it has a tender shade upon it. So I will take your advice, Miss Kettaway. And I think I should like the skirt made in tabs; satin bows down the front and a sash behind. And you must be sure to let me have it home not later than this day fortnight."

III.

The shirts progressed to a conclusion. Jessy Moon was a quick worker; and just about that time the shop at High Marten had no embroidery to give out. Adam Drake continued to call in from time to time to inquire how they were getting on. Being for his own wear he could only be anxious upon the point.

One evening when he was there, sitting by the parrot, endeavouring to keep that screamer quiet, and looking at Jessy, who was plying her needle at the table, he began to relate a bit of news.

"Ann Seabright is going next month," said he.

"Going to leave you?" questioned Jessy, doubtfully.

"Her niece wants her over at High Marten to mind the children while she's in the shop, serving customers," said Drake. "She told me to-day that the minding of children, after the cares of my place, would be like a rest to her bones."

"Oh dear!" laughed Jessy. "But I'm very sorry, Mr. Drake. What shall you do without Ann?"

"Ann wants me to take the niece's eldest in her place, a girl of seventeen. Hardworking and capable, Ann says."

Jessy looked off her work for a moment. "Would she not be too young—for your housekeeping?"

"Well," said Carrier Drake, venturing to stroke Valentina, who was showing herself cantankerous this evening, "I thought of taking a housekeeper as well."

"What—two servants?" said Jessy, surprised into the remark.

"I didn't think of the other one, the housekeeper, being a servant, but a—a—wife," hesitated Adam, stroking the green feathers vigorously.

Jessie's thread came into a frightful tangle; all her attention had to be given to it, which in some measure hid her face.

"Her name's Sheba," went on Mr. Drake, staring at the parrot.

"*Sheba!*" cried Jessy. "What—the housekeeper?"

"No; the girl."

"What an odd name."

"It's what they call her. Christened Bathsheba, I believe."

"Fine man! Fine man, Drake!" put in Valentina.

"And I—ventured to think, Miss Jessy, that perhaps—you—you might not object to be my wife," said Drake, screwing up his courage.

Jessy collapsed altogether. She said neither "Yes!" nor "No!"

Had that particular shirt she was engaged upon been wanted for its master's hanging and must be finished against time, she could not have plied her needle quicker.

"Give a nut to Valentina," croaked the bird.

Adam Drake rose to get a bit of sugar; to do so he had to pass Jessy. He looked at her, and she looked at him. What he saw in her mild blue eyes, or she in his richer dark ones, neither of

them could have said; but he suddenly lifted her to him and gave her a hearty kiss, for he knew he should have his wife.

"Men are all alike; don't trust 'em," said Valentina.

Not long after Miss Jones's wedding-dress of cinnamon-brown had gone home, the Miss Kettaways found themselves called upon to make another. Miss Miranda had stepped out to try on a spencer when the bride elect called to give the order. Hearing the news on her return she sat down in a sea of consternation.

"Going to be married!—to *him!*—that Jessy Moon! Well, she has played her cards craftily."

"I see nothing amiss in her," returned Miss Susan. "She's modest and civil speaking; one can't say otherwise."

"You never see nothing amiss in nobody, Susan," retorted Miss Miranda, whose speech was not always on the high ropes in vexatious moments. "What's the dress to be?"

"Grey twill, faced with same coloured silk. I made her have the facings of silk; she wanted to say it was too grand for her. 'Not a bit of it, Jessy,' said I. 'You are going to be a good man's wife, who has a nice house and a good business, and to have a servant of your own; you ought to have had it all silk.' And so she ought," concluded Miss Susan.

"There's that beast of a parrot outside again to-day," cried the younger sister. "Just hark at her!"

"Meddling old maid!—ugly old maid!" shrieked out Valentina from over the way. "The men are all alike; don't trust 'em."

HEADS OR TAILS?

IN order to enable the reader to grasp the situation at once, let it be briefly stated that Miss Violet Danvers was an extremely pretty girl, and a flirt. She had lost her parents many years ago, and the various friends with whom she passed her time were accustomed to regard her as somewhat of a "handful;" nevertheless, they anticipated her visits with the keenest pleasure, and were willing enough to bear the responsibility of looking after her, for the sake of enjoying her society.

She was a very fascinating young person, small, and most delicately made, with dainty hands and feet, and a little round waist just reaching the right size for the rest of her figure. Yet, in spite of these good points, Violet's face was undeniably the best part of her, for *there* could be read as plainly as the open leaves of a book, the story of her sweet, sunny, loveable nature. Yet we have just condemned her as a flirt. Well, a girl may be that, and not wholly a reprobate, as some sour-tempered, ill-favoured, and, in most cases, "disappointed" representatives of the weaker sex would so willingly designate her. Besides, with Violet flirting was even less blameable than with many others, because she did it in such innocency, and so entirely without any arrière pensée in the matter. She was young, she was beautiful, she was rich, and she accepted all the attention which fell to her lot accordingly, as naturally as a queen bee receives the homage of her faithful subjects.

And yet, though women are so proverbially vain, there comes a time in every true woman's life when she learns to care more for a single token of regard from one individual than for fifty such from other admirers.

Violet Danvers, when she arrived at Oxford on the Michaelmas Term of 188—, had not yet limited herself to the favoured *one*. But she was decidedly tending that way, for she no longer felt the slightest interest in the undergraduate race of mankind, whereas she entertained the very strongest regard for the two sons of her host—the head of St. Stephen's College. The puzzle was, which son to choose? She had every reason to believe them both to be her willing slaves. Indeed, it was obviously an open and well understood contest between the two brothers; and they were each so attractive in their widely different stages, that, considering Violet was a young woman with a liking for everything which is worth having, from lovers down to strawberries-and-cream, it was no wonder she hesitated in making her final decision.

Cecil, the elder son of Dr. and Mrs. Hamilton, was rather above the middle height, slightly built, with a physique which told of his

indoor tastes and studious habits; an impression which was confirmed by a single glance at his delicate, finely-cut features. His eyes were large, soft, and dark, and the long dark hair falling over his pale forehead completed his faultless representation of the æsthetic genius of modern England. His passion was music, and he had so long and faithfully wooed the art, that his friends had begun to believe she was always to remain his only mistress. But the truest devotee is yet human, and when a young and beautiful woman comes across his path, he is just as likely to fall in love with her as the ordinary run of mankind.

Now, Dick Hamilton—thank Heaven! as he often said to himself—was a very ordinary young fellow. He only happened to be a fine specimen of a style of man which has done a vast deal more than it ever troubles to recollect for the English nation. Very tall, he was powerfully and splendidly built, active, athletic, perfectly healthy in mind and body, with a frank and open countenance, and a cheery, ringing voice, which had made him one of the prime favourites, not only in his own college, but in the whole university. Of brains he had just enough to enable him to take his degree, due time being, of course, allowed for the process; but then, other and more important matters than book work absorbed his attention. He was president of the O.U.B.C., he rowed in his college races as well as in the 'Varsity eight and at Henley Regatta; he was a member of a very popular club in the university; and, in fact, took such a prominent part in the sport and amusements of the place that his young admirers were apt to say:

"Oxford may as well shut up shop, when the Babe (the name by which he was familiarly known) goes down!"

And he had fallen in love with Violet Danvers!

But to return to the visit which the said young lady paid in November, and which both brothers decided must be the finish of the race they were running.

Cecil decidedly gained the first point by being disengaged on the afternoon of her arrival, and able to meet her at the railway station, and escort her back to college. Dick was obliged to be down at the river, looking after a freshman's college regatta, and Cecil had matters entirely his own way.

"It is really pleasant of you to have decided on coming down to us just now," he said in his soft, languid voice, as he sat by her side in his mother's drawing-room, whilst together they sipped Indian tea and nibbled daintily rolled up wafers of bread and butter.

"Why just now?" Violet asked.

"Because I hope you will consent to be one of the audience at my 'musical exercise' next week."

"I cannot promise until you explain to me what you mean by a 'musical exercise,' which to the ordinary mind has a painful savour of schoolroom pianos and compulsory practising."

"It is the performance of an original cantata called 'Death and his Bride,' which I have written for the degree of Mus. Doc., and shall conduct in the Sheldonian Theatre."

"You have really written it yourself? Oh! I am so glad, because it's so interesting to know authors and composers and all those sort of people."

"Your presence in the theatre will help me, I am sure," said Cecil, in still lower tones; "for the strain of the undertaking is almost more than I can bear. I know that my music will not be understood. To perform it to an ordinary mixed audience is worse than setting pearls before swine. If they applaud at all, it will be in the wrong place, or they may clap the mere beauty of the voices, or the technical skill of the instrumentalists. But the meaning, the soul of the work, that which, coming from me, has taken with it a part of my very life, is hid from their eyes! You will understand it, Miss Danvers; you will reckon the price I have paid for this, the first original creation of my brain."

Violet hardly knew how to answer this rhapsody, but she was under the spell of his dark eyes and pathetic pleadings, as with a sigh almost as sad as his own, she said:

"I will do what I can for you, I will help you when and where I can."

At that moment the door opened and Dick Hamilton came in, seeming to bring with him a breath of fresh air into the heated, sweet-scented atmosphere of the room. He greeted Violet with genuine pleasure.

"Well, now, I do think it's awfully good of you to come down to us at such a beastly time of the year as this! Though I dare say its not much worse in Oxford than anywhere else. Do you know you have got it most frightfully hot in here, mother?"

"We do not feel it, my boy," said Mrs. Hamilton. She was a mixture of both her sons, and loved them quite impartially, but she was obliged to show some consideration for Cecil's health, which was far from robust.

"Ah, well! I know it's a wicked habit which people who come into a room from out-of-doors have of grumbling at its heat. Now Miss Danvers how much tea have you left me? Plenty, I hope, for I give you fair warning I'm mortal hungry."

And Dick, with two long strides, came to the tea-table, took up the teapot before his mother had time to reach it, and shaking it contemptuously, said:

"'Tisn't good enough. I'll ring the bell and have a good big cup of cocoa. What have you got for me to eat, mother? Only those mouthfuls of bread and butter. Oh! I declare this will never do! You wait until I invite you to tea in my rooms, Miss Danvers, and then see what a good square meal we make of it! Cope," to the butler who answered his summons, "make me a cup of cocoa, will

you, as quickly as you can, and bring in some cake or buns or something or other intended to satisfy a man and not a pigmy."

"Wasn't it very cold down at the river?" Mrs. Hamilton asked, to divert her big boy until his hunger should be by way of being satisfied.

"Cold? No, of course not! It's sitting indoors over the fire that is cold work; you never hear a man grumble when he's out-of-doors and moving."

"Those trees in the garden," said Cecil irrelevantly, turning from the window out of which he had been gazing, and speaking to Violet Danvers: "those trees are types of the most glorious colouring! I never remember seeing the autumn tints so golden and red as they have been this year."

"'Types!' why 'types?'" interposed Dick. "But I will tell you what, Miss Danvers: I'll take you out in my Canadian canoe up the Cherwell (I believe I can manage it to-morrow morning), and then you will see the trees and types and all the rest of it to perfection, and have the additional pleasure of being in a boat along with me."

This last remark was made very playfully, and in a manner which could hardly have offended the most cross-grained critic.

"My dear boy," said his mother, "you must remember that other people are not so enthusiastic as you on the subject of boating, and that to the ordinary mind ——"

"Miss Danvers' is not an ordinary mind, and I cannot think how you can dare to call her such! Now, please bear me out in my assertion," turning to Violet, "and accept my offer with alacrity."

"I do, Mr. Hamilton, for my own credit as well as yours."

This bantering seemed a foolish waste of time to Cecil, and he rejoiced when an engagement to dine out obliged Dick to go and dress, and left him once more in possession of the field. The evening was all Cecil's own, and he spent the greater part of it in leaning quaintly over the back of a chair and airing his peculiar views for Violet's especial benefit. When it began to get late and Violet might have proposed going upstairs, he sat down at the piano and played to her for more than an hour with exquisite taste and feeling, and without a single note of music to help him in the production of these sweet sounds. No wonder that when Violet fell asleep that night her head was full of superlatives, and in her dream she lived over again all the queer, sad, beautiful ideas which Cecil had sought to instil into her. She was too young yet to know how strained as well as how strange these new creeds must ever be.

The next morning at breakfast, Cecil was quite silent, though this lassitude should in fairness be attributed more to nervous exhaustion than to laziness. Dick, like all thoroughly healthy people, was quite as "fit" in the morning as at any other time of the day, and after giving his audience a very funny account of his dinner the night before, and of "the stunning good songs which some of the fellows

sang after it," he asked Violet if she would be ready for the canoeing at eleven o'clock; and punctual to the minute his good-tempered head appeared at the door, just as all the bells in Oxford were chiming the hour.

They set off alone together across the park to the private boat-house on the upper reaches of the winding Cherwell. If anyone is inclined to question the propriety of this young man and this maiden starting on an expedition together, let him or her please to remember that a Canadian canoe does not conveniently hold more than two persons.

Whilst Violet lingered on the banks, Dick hurried into the boat-house, unslung and carried down to the river the light birch canoe, and arranged the cushions luxuriously along the bottom of it: adding an extra warm fur rug for Violet to sit on and another to wrap over her—which he had thoughtfully brought with him for the purpose. Then he paddled down to where she was waiting, and helping her to step daintily into the canoe—a very necessary precaution unless you mean to have an impromptu bathe—they started up stream.

It was a glorious autumn morning, and Violet lying back upon her cushions most thoroughly enjoyed herself. Of human beings there were none in sight, but of life there was plenty. First, a moor-hen rose startled from her bed of reeds and rushes; then a gaudy kingfisher darted down stream in search of his dinner; a wagtail sat upon the bending boughs of a willow tree and surveyed the world timorously from his own point of view; and a water rat, frightened by the faint sound of the paddle, dived out of danger into the soft mud of the bed of the river.

Dick was a most expert paddler and amused himself by steering the canoe within an inch of the bank and never touching it. Sometimes he issued a sudden command to "Duck your head!" And then Violet, who was so low down before in the boat she scarcely imagined herself capable of shrinking any more, would nevertheless obey orders somehow or other, and notice that her little soft hat had narrowly escaped being carried away by a big over-hanging bough.

"What puzzles me," she said after one or two such experiences, "is, what becomes of you!"

And she looked back at her great tall companion.

"Oh! I'm pretty clever at telescoping up; I've had a good deal of practice in that way, you know." And then Dick chatted away and told her, innocently and without a suspicion of conceit, about a great many other things of which he had considerable experience; finishing up his long eulogium upon boat racing in general with the remark:

"The College fours are on next week. I do hope you will come down to the river and see them."

"Are you rowing in them?"

"Rather!"

"And shall you win?"

"A race is never won until it's over, that's a certainty; but I am not going to turn prophet."

"Well, I will come down and see it, if you will promise me to win."

"That is a big bribe to offer any fellow, but I accept it!"

A sudden silence fell upon them both, and much as she had enjoyed her paddle it was with a feeling of relief that Violet espied the boat-house just ahead, where the business of landing and of putting away the canoe, completely unloosed their tongues and dispelled all shyness. Still Violet could not forget the feeling which had come over her, of having stepped dangerously near the edge of some unknown depths, and for the future she determined to avoid as much as possible solitary expeditions with Dick Hamilton. As for Dick he returned home in the highest spirits, and with the natural confidence of his sanguine nature, indulged in the belief that his prize was already won.

But in the afternoon Cecil had his innings when he escorted Violet Danvers to listen to the service at Magdalen Chapel; he had only been able (he said) to obtain two tickets necessary for admission, and nobody demurred at their starting off alone together.

The verger placed Violet in one of the big stalls, and Cecil took care to seat himself in a favourable position opposite. In the beautiful, dimly-lighted chapel, listening to the soft strains of the organist, the musical intonation of the chaplain, and the unique perfection of the singing of the choristers, Violet forgot the joyous, active, noisy world, in which Dick Hamilton so exclusively rejoiced, and for the present lived in a shadowland of strange yearnings and unsatisfied desires. When the service was over the two lingered in the ante-chapel listening to the voluntary, and, it may be, silently enjoying each other's society, whilst Violet made up her mind that she was in quite as much danger with Cecil as with Dick.

And thus the days passed on. First, Dick would arrange a sailing expedition upon the floods which covered the meadows bordering the "upper river;" and then Cecil would bring home tickets for the inaugural lecture of the new Slade professor. "Though," he said ruefully, "what can we expect but disappointment after Ruskin?" Another day Dick carried off Violet to watch an Association football match in the Parks, which she found rather dull work; but Cecil capped this treat by taking her to the meeting of an amateur string quartette, which she found duller still!

Meanwhile, each of the brothers was perfectly content in the firm belief that he was to be the happy winner of the coveted prize. Of course it was very wrong indeed of Violet thus to trifle with their feelings, but what was she to do when she could not tell her own mind? It was no pleasure to her to vacillate between two magnets, and she would have been a great deal more at her ease if only her love affairs were satisfactorily settled; but though the decision rested entirely with herself, she was altogether unable to make it.

At last matters reached a climax, when the two brothers proposed to her on the same day! But she cut the Gordian knot with true womanly ingenuity by refusing them both. They knew she did not mean such cruelty, and when they pressed her, this is what she said:

"Let me wait until you, Cecil, have performed your cantata, and you, Dick, have rowed your race, and then I will tell you which of you I will choose!"

For, like Portia of old, Violet determined now to decide her fate by pure chance, vowing solemnly to herself that she would marry the man who made the best impression on her, when, in such widely different ways, each sought to display his skill.

After this proclamation, Dick spent the whole of the few remaining afternoons on the river, rowing desperately hard himself and encouraging the others in his boat to do likewise; for clearly if he lost the race he had no chance whatever: while Cecil devoted all his time and energies to rehearsals, and at the last moment managed to make arrangements with some of the very best London professionals to come down from town to undertake the solo parts.

His day of trial arrived the first: and according to arrangement, punctually at half-past two Mrs. Hamilton and Violet walked over to the Sheldonian Theatre.

The place was apparently already crammed, for rumours had been circulated to the effect that Mr. Hamilton's "exercise" would be no ordinary one, and most of the wives of the college dignitaries, besides a crowd of townspeople, had assembled to hear it—undergraduates were chiefly conspicuous by their absence. Places had been reserved for Mr. Hamilton just by the state chair of the Vice Chancellor, whose duty it is—however unmusical his tastes—to listen solemnly to the "exercise" from beginning to end: but he had not come in yet.

Presently a good deal of clapping announced the arrival of the "musical judge," a picturesque looking old man dressed in a most gorgeous gown of white and crimson silk, who sat down at one side of the raised platform, and, on being presented with a copy of the full score carefully followed every note of the music, as became a judge! More clapping, and Cecil came in, bâton in hand, wearing the purple-and-black gown of a Mus. Bac., and looking intensely pale and eager. He was followed almost immediately by the Vice Chancellor, to whom from his elevated seat, he turned and made a most courteous bow, which the Vice Chancellor returned with due ceremony. Then Cecil gave one hurried, involuntary glance at Violet and turning his back upon his audience, proceeded to conduct the performance.

If Violet had been a more acute musical critic, she might have better appreciated the subtile harmonies with which the cantata undoubtedly abounded, but even her simple tastes were fully gratified. It was quaint, original, and in some parts melodious; and watching the quick eager motions of the conductor, and the excited trembling

of his left hand as he raised it to urge the choir to emphasise a sudden "forte" or dropped it for a "piano," she felt what a wonderful thing it was to have created such a work; and what a still more wonderful thing it was that the author of it should have fallen in love with her own insignificant self.

In about an hour, amid rapturous applause, the "exercise" came to an end, and Cecil, whiter even than before, turned again to make his second formal bow to the Vice Chancellor. Then the "musical judge" came forward and heartily shook hands with and congratulated the young composer, and they left the platform together, while the cheers still rang through the building. It was a proud moment certainly for Cecil Hamilton, and yet he cared more for Violet's first glance as he met her outside the theatre, than for all the applause within it. She was very quiet, and something perilously like a tear glistened in her soft eyes.

"Tell me now?" he asked, in a voice this time low, not from affectation, but from emotion.

"I cannot—we must wait."

Yes, wait. Cecil knew well enough what for; but he did not have to wait long, for the boat race was rowed on the following day.

It was cold, but fortunately a fine afternoon, and Mrs. Hamilton, with the double object of chaperoning Violet and of seeing her son row, consented to come down to the river, though very few ladies put in an appearance there for the fours. Dick accompanied them as far as the 'Varsity barge, where he left them comfortably established on the roof under the care of several of his friends, who promised to answer all the questions which Violet as an uninitiated spectator was sure to ask. The river was a pretty sight. At first it was full of boats —tub pairs and fours and scratch eights, for Michaelmas is the term for coaching the freshmen—all hurrying back to their respective college barges to be out of the way before the fours came on. Then, as the course began to clear, the banks became alive with a crowd of flannel-clad undergraduates, hurrying across the river in punts, that they might run up the towing-path towards Iffley (where the boats started), their terriers at their heels and a general amount of life and good humour about them which was invigorating even to witness.

"There," said young Montague, standing at Violet's elbow; "do you see that boat in the distance starting from the 'Varsity boat-house? That's 'St. Stephen's' going to drop down to Iffley. They won't be off for a quarter of an hour yet, for the Derby boat hasn't even left its barge. Do look how beautiful a racing four looks after these clumsy tubs you have been trying to admire. There are only two boats in for the fours this year, the others all scratched several weeks ago. It ought to be an awfully close race, and with all my heart I pity Hamilton having to steer them."

"But Mr. Hamilton isn't *cox!*" Violet exclaimed, with indig-

nation. That settled the point for good and all; she never would marry a man who was only a cox.

"Rather not; at least, not the kind of cox you mean. These are the coxswainless fours, you know, and one of the men has the ropes under his feet and steers looking back and keeping as straight a course as he can. But it's killing work, I can tell you, and likely to be heart-breaking work, too, when to be taken a yard out of one's course may mean losing the whole race."

"Why have they made Mr. Hamilton steer?" Violet asked, this time with anxious sympathy.

"Why? Because he's a long way the best man for it, and for anything else, too. Derby is the stronger crew, but all the betting is on St. Stephen's, just because Hamilton's in it."

Violet felt her cheeks tingle with pleasure; this unanimous popularity surely told its own tale.

"Which is the winning post?" she asked next.

"Well, there are two. The river is a bit narrow for racing in some parts, and so the boats start one of them twenty yards ahead of the other; and the first boat, if it means to win, has to reach that post over there," pointing to the right, "before the second one reaches here just in front of us. It's a bit hard with twenty yards between them to judge which is really ahead during the race, but a gun will be fired as soon as it's won. Hullo! Why they must have started!"

Violet could not possibly tell how her companion came by this piece of information; for though the opposite bank had been almost deserted for some time—most of them having run up towards Iffley—of course the boats were a long way out of sight, and not even a sound of cheering reached her listening ears. But Montague, with quick and knowing eyes, had espied that on the distant bridge of Iffley, of which he could just discern one grey arch, the crowd had begun to move from left to right; and in a few moments, to confirm his statement, a faint sound was heard by them both. It grew louder and louder, this shouting of the enthusiastic undergraduates as they ran along the bank. Then the foremost of them came in sight; and at last, to Violet's intense excitement, first one boat and then another appeared round the corner.

"Derby has the first station; and, by Jove! it's a close race!" was Montague's first exclamation.

Violet fixed her eyes intently upon the second of the two boats, in which already she fancied she could discern her lover. Some of the spectators on the barge, not being able to calculate to a nicety the distance of twenty yards, kept saying:

"Oh, Derby is winning easily! They are walking in!"

Indeed, it seemed to Violet as though the distance between the two boats was greater than it ought to be, but she held her tongue, and Montague kept saying:

"By Jove, it's a close race! But we shall win it yet!"

The steering was admirable. St. Stephen's came along as straight and as steadily as though the most expert cox were giving his whole attention to the work; so did Derby, until within fifty yards of the winning-post, and then, in an unlucky moment, they turned a shade out of their course into the middle of the stream. May be, this slight error decided the race, or they were more rowed out than their opponents; at any rate, before ever they reached the further winning-post a gun, fired by the umpire, announced that St. Stephen's had passed the nearer one. The race was won!

Then the cheering and shouting and even yelling, of the St. Stephen's men upon the bank, became almost deafening, even out-of-doors! They threw their caps in the air; they stamped, and waved, and screamed: "Well rowed, well *rowed!* well rowed, Hamilton!" And generally testified their gratification with that young intensity which, alas! we most of us lose all too soon. Violet could hardly refrain from shouting with them, she felt so glad and excited; and when Derby, according to established etiquette, loitered about for St. Stephen's to row leisurely by before them, and Dick, from his proud position in the winning boat, looked up deliberately to the barge where she was standing, she felt the blood mount even higher to her cheeks, and her pulses beat quicker and quicker.

As soon as ever he could manage it, Dick escaped from the college barge and rejoined the ladies, who were waiting for him. His mother and Montague walked on in front, and, very leisurely, he and Violet followed them through Christ Church meadow, whilst he asked her once again if she could not love him and promise to be his wife.

"Yes, Dick," in sweet, faltering tones, "for you have won me, as assuredly as you have just won the race!"

Cecil bore his disappointment well, and in course of time married a studious Girton girl, with whom, if he did not accomplish much for the music of the present, he became a very faithful apostle of the music of the future. And moreover he made her a most suitable husband, which he never would have done to Violet Danvers.

WITH US STILL.

On the moorland wild and barren, where few sounds of life may be,
Where the tall grass waves in whispers, like the murmurs of the sea,
Sinks the sun in clouds of sadness that a weary day is told
On the wrinkled brow of labour: and the night is dark and cold.

Not the plover's parting clamour, not the owlet's note I hear,
Not the wind amazed and frighted on the moorland dark and drear;
But the sound of many voices and the feet that leave no tread,
Coming thus to meet me homeward—they, the legion of the dead.

Some with bright and youthful faces—ah! I knew them well of old;
For we parted in the morning when the east was tinged with gold,
When the air was light with gladness, and the earth was white with flowers,
Ere the bitter Tree of Knowledge cast its shadow on the hours.

And some who held our trembling hand with tearful look and fond,
As they crossed the chilly river to the land so dark beyond,
And we bent to catch the whisper, that they saw through mist and chill,
The light which lights the cheerless soul ere the weary heart is still.

And the dear ones in the sunlight of our home, our stay and guide,
Working with us in the vineyard till the call at eventide,
Smiling yet as they once did smile when we watched the brief adieu,
When we went our way with weeping till their presence came anew.

And ever on the moorland wild, I hear their hurrying feet,
And ever when the sun goes down the nearer when we meet;
For I feel bright eyes are watching long, beneath the starry dome,
And the voices in the darkness here would bid me hasten home.

C. J. Langston.

M. L. GOW. J. SWAIN.

THE SEVEN OF SPADES.

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE STARS.

THE Seven of Spades.

Eustace picked up the card from the vestry floor. An unaccountable thrill of uneasy alarm passed through him as he touched the harmless bit of pasteboard. "Dropped by one of the choir, I suppose," he said, to reassure himself. Yet in his mind there lingered the conviction that it had *not* been there when he and Lady Valeria left the place. He carried it with him out into the churchyard, and, bidding the old verger good-night, set himself to think out the strange story that had been confided to him.

He wished he could disbelieve it from beginning to end. Why should it not be the fiction of a distempered brain prompted by some secret ill-will of Lady Valeria towards her son Oliver? Her manner had been confused when he pressed for details. She had withheld every important point of the story, every fact that might aid his search: her son's real name, age, description. Yet she spoke the truth. He felt it. Her fierce, passionate yearning for her boy was genuine—past all feigning. And he must help her.

To and fro he paced under the churchyard poplars, revolving and rejecting scheme after scheme.

Could de Cressy help him? The duel must have been a notorious fact in its day. An English officer, the heir to a baronetcy, could not have been done to death in the Phœnix without open scandal. And yet—if "Jack" had not been killed? No! Eustace shrank from contemplating that grievous possibility. Jack *must* have been shot by Lord Kilmoyne; and with him and the Magraths must have disappeared the only proofs of the marriage. Let but Jack be dead and the Vicar felt equal to disposing of the claims of his son.

The Magraths. Would further search after them be of use? Lady Valeria by her own showing had utterly failed to trace them. Given two West of Ireland emigrants undescribed, to find their address thirty

or forty years later in the United States. A needle in a truss of hay was a hopeful quest by comparison. This was the identification of two blades of grass in the whole hay-stack.

Nothing to be done but await Lady Valeria's promised letter; and here at last he turned up his Vicarage steps and unlocked the door.

On his hall table lay an unfamiliar cap and stick. He regarded them with scant welcome and entered his study, where he found their proprietor pacing its narrow limits impatiently. He was a spare, active, elderly man, with a cousinly likeness to the Vicar, half buried in a huge travelling coat, with a Bradshaw in his hand and an open Gladstone bag on the table beside him.

"Arbuthnot Corbett? Of all people! I thought you were at Davos!"

"I've been there and come home again, as I shall from any place you can mention on the map of Europe. As long as there is nothing to speak of but solid earth between me and this home of my heart, back I come to the dear old smoky chimney-pots as sure as a carrier-pigeon. But the sea—ah, that's another thing!"

He was rummaging in the bag as he spoke and produced a thick blue envelope which he threw across the table to Eustace, still talking beyond possibility of interruption.

"So I'm off to Liverpool by the next train, and to New York by the 'Oceanic' in a fortnight. The doctors have got their will of me at last, you see. That is the last bit of work I am to do for six months at least."

"It's uncommonly good of you I am sure," Eustace succeeded in saying. "Come and have some dinner."

"No, thanks. Your good housekeeper has offered all imaginable refreshment. I was afraid I should have to start without seeing you. I've just a quarter of an hour longer. You'll find all I have to say written down there. Full instructions how to proceed in tackling the trustees of your Parish charities. It's a hornet's nest you have thrust your head into, my man. I've taken counsel's opinion as to the vested rights of your beadle."

Their talk for the next five minutes was purely legal and parochial, and then Arbuthnot Corbett jumped up and began to shut his bag.

"What are you going to do in America?" asked his cousin.

"I haven't a notion. What *is* a man to do who isn't to meddle with politics, literature, science, anything that makes life worth living? A twelvemonths' 'change of scene and gentle amusement!' Twelve months' Death and Burial!"

"Can I get you any introductions?"

"No, don't. I've got a portmanteau full already. What's the good of them? Give me something to do and I'll bless your name for ever."

Eustace started. "If I thought you were in earnest——" he stopped short. "I believe I am possessed by a story I have just

been hearing, and am beginning to look at everything that happens according to its bearing on it."

"Don't disappoint me. You were going to ask me to do something. Out with it. Quick! What were you going to ask?"

"To find me two Irish emigrants, address unknown; also the date of their emigration. I was just considering it a moment ago as the most hopeless quest I could undertake."

Arbuthnot Corbett's note-book was out in an instant and his keen face, all alert, was turned to Eustace's with an expression of eager interest. "Name? Number of family? Place of abode in Ireland?"

Eustace told him as much as he knew himself, promising to forward any further information he might receive later.

Mr. Corbett closed his note-book contentedly. "It's the youngest you want—Stephen, eh? Do you want him alive or dead?"

"I should wish to find him dead," said the Vicar, more honestly than ninety-nine men out of a hundred dare have spoken.

"That means if he's alive he's dangerous," and Corbett's sharp eyes twinkled. "Very good. If he's living I'll cable, if he's dead you can wait for the next mail. What's that?"

"*That*" was the Seven of Spades, which Eustace had unconsciously held all this time.

"Oh, nothing! A choir-boy's peccadillo. I was absurdly startled by it just now, though."

Corbett took it and examined it curiously. "Paris made. An unusual make and one of a fresh pack. Not a choir-boy's plaything, my friend. Where did you find it?"

"In the vestry. I'd give something to know who dropped it."

His cousin without more ado possessed himself of two of the pins used to fasten up notices of services and memoranda on the wall near the Vicar's writing-table, and stuck the card up prominently above the fire-place.

"There, that's incongruous enough to attract notice. Leave it there and keep your eyes open when any newcomer enters, and, if my brains are worth half the sacrifices I am making to get them back into working order, you'll hear something of that Seven of Spades before a month's out. Time's up! Good-bye. You shall have a Magrath within six months if there's one left in the land."

Many days followed, during which Eustace Stannard went about his work pursued by a vision of Lady Valeria's great, passionate eyes filled with their agony of fierce impatience. Every spare moment was devoted to considering her story from all imaginable points of view, re-reading and annotating the cipher notes of the interview, which he had made with the utmost care and accuracy, or awaiting her promised summons which never came.

He had made a few desultory and unsatisfactory enquiries on his own account meanwhile, beginning as was most natural with Lionel

de Cressy. It was in a singularly conscious fashion that he dropped her name into the conversation the first time that he found himself alone with his Curate. Lionel was too frankly surprised to be suspicious.

"Lady Valeria!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Where in the world have you been meeting her? Not in St. Fridolin's I'll engage."

"Why not in St. Fridolin's."

"Would you have all the Meynells turn in their graves with horror at the thoughts of one of the name setting a foot in it? Oliver was a shining light of Exeter Hall you know, and his mantle has fallen on his son's shoulders. It's the way of the firm. You know the great bankers, Meynell, Meynell and Mott?"

"I have seen her name constantly at meetings and on subscription lists. Mr. Meynell is her son?"

"Yes. He's a good solemn old boy, with a solemn wife and two solemn babies. We don't see much of each other. Now the daughter, Mabel—Lady Charles Brant—and I are great allies. She's musical, clever and queer. They're all odd, more or less."

"Do you happen to remember the late Lord Kilmoyne?"

"Valeria's father? The maddest old scamp! The regular, typical, claret-drinking, duel-fighting old Irish nobleman: the gayest of young dogs to the day of his death. How a child of his could ever have married into the Meynell family passes all comprehension."

Mr. Stannard listened to this biographical sketch in meditative silence. "Did he not fight some rather notorious duel?"

"With Fighting Fitz-Gerald you mean? That's the only one I know. Ah, that was a queer story ——"

But here Mr. Stannard somewhat curtly suggested that his business was in arrears and postponed the narration.

Looking in the Peerage he could only find Lady Valeria's name entered as the "youngest daughter of the seventh Earl of Kilmoyne. Born 1823. Married to Oliver Meynell, Esq., 1841." That was all. In an old copy, procured with some difficulty, he found "Kilmoyne, 7th Earl" and a record of his services in the Peninsula. He found the younger brother Claude de Cressy and his wife (Aunt de Cressy, Lionel's mother) and his sister Lady Catherine de Cressy ('old, blind aunt Kitty'). He found a string of names of Lady Valeria's generation, all but herself dying in infancy or unmarried; but of any marriage previous to that with Oliver Meynell found he no trace. It had, if it had ever taken place, been kept a family secret to the last.

So much the harder to prove it, if it had ever taken place. There was the blot at starting.

It was a wretched business all round, and he could do nothing further till more material was given into his hands.

After all it was Arbuthnot Corbett who made the first sign.

His letter was dated from Queenstown, and, preliminaries over, began:

"Find you a Magrath, did you ask? I've found you a dozen, I believe, and your man amongst them. I thought out my plans during my journey to Liverpool, and decided on delaying my start till I could see whether it was not possible to pick up the trail in Ireland. As the doctors consider the question of climate quite a secondary one, no one opposed my eccentric fancy for a winter visit to Killarney, and once there I made tracks promptly for the place you named, Glenara. Did you know it was a castle as well as a town, both belonging to Meynell, the banker? A flourishing region, thanks to his money-bags and his Scotch agent—shot by this time probably.

"I made friends with the priest, Father Fahey, a very decent fellow. He threw up his hands and exclaimed when the name of Magrath passed my lips. 'Did he know it? As if the very life hadn't been worried out of him, and Father Dennis Moriarty before him, about that same! First one coming and then the other after Stephen Magrath, and no help could anyone give him at all, not even Magrath's own sister, Ellen Doyne. He had gone to America, wife and children, three girls and one boy, and that was the last of him.' 'When had he gone?' 'Indeed, Ellen's memory had not been strong. She used to say it was either the year of the famine or the year of the building of Diney Todd's stables (*i.e.* '40 to '49).' I should have left Father Fahey discoursing, out of all patience, but for a comical twinkle in his eye, and an interjaculatory 'But wait till I tell ye,' that prefaced each illustration of the hopelessness of all search, and I was rewarded. 'What would ye call that now?' he ended, with a triumphant flourish, producing from his pocket-book a letter. A genuine letter—and recent—and from old Stephen Magrath himself. It was written to his sister, the above mentioned Ellen Doyne, enclosing money to enable her to join him, supposing her to be yet alive and unmarried. I enclose a copy. Ellen having died some months previously, the money was returned, but there was the letter and the address, 'Petropolis, Illinois,' and from there you may expect my next letter to be dated, that is if all that's mortal of me be not delivered to the fishes before we sight Sandy Hook."

The letter enclosed was brief and to the purpose. The writer was "doing well in a large grocery and general store, and hoped his dear sister would advise with Father Dennis, or whoever was priest at Glenara now, as to the best way of joining him. Bridget—rest her soul—was gone, but Katty kept house for him. Norah was married to a German tailor, and the boy was prospering."

Prospering! "Jack"—the possible baronet, the certain heir of Glenara and of Lady Valeria's share of the Meynell wealth, prospering in a grocery and general store in a western town! One of the strongest temptations of the Vicar's life assailed him then. To put the letter in the fire there and then and telegraph to Corbett to drop the search and keep silence. So powerful was the impulse that in sheer self-distrust the Vicar folded the letter and without another

moment's consideration set out at once to place it in Lady Valeria's hands and take the matter out of his own disposal.

Seagrave Place is a once aristocratic and still eminently respectable region. A short street of handsome, dull, old-fashioned houses, that seemed very silent and lonely when Eustace entered it about eight o'clock that evening. Number 11 had been the town house of the Meynells from father to son for three generations, and Lady Valeria still clung to it. She had, as in duty bound, indeed, offered it to her son, Oliver, on his marriage; but he, with filial devotion, refused to disturb her; perhaps moved by Mrs. Oliver's declaration that she, personally, would prefer second-floor lodgings in Pimlico—so oppressive was the majestic gloom that enveloped the locality.

Eustace—approaching on the opposite side of the road—stopped to gaze meditatively at the lighted windows of the house. They suddenly grew dim as he watched them—rather to his surprise—till he noticed the bright streaks at the edges of the thick blinds of the lower windows, and guessed that the inmates had gone down stairs to dinner. The windows above still glowed with fire-light, and in one shone a reading-lamp, casting a queer elongated figure of the tall chair-back near it on the white linen blind. Another shadow and a moving one became confused with it for a moment. Presently a woman's head and shoulders were flung in grotesque distortion across the white field of the blind, and then the blind itself was slightly pushed aside. Someone gazed out on the streets below, and then disappeared, giving place to the tall chair-back again.

It was but a trifle; the action of some housemaid on the lookout for her friend the policeman; and yet it sent a rush of unaccountable curiosity and misgiving through the watcher's mind, and made him stay his steps a space.

The street-door of No. 11 opened suddenly, but very softly, just as he at last crossed the road. A woman slipped out and drew it behind her with noiseless care, but before she could descend the steps Eustace, with rapid decision, made an impetuous rush, and coming perilously near collision caused her to start back.

"I beg your pardon. Is this Dr. Diarmid's?" he asked, using a name he had read on a brass plate three doors off.

"Not here. I do not know him," was the sharp reply, and the speaker hurried past him and was off and away down the street into the darkness before he could say another word.

"Never mind, I shall know your black eyes and white face again if need be, I think, my good woman, better than you will know me," was his reflection as he turned round and rang the bell on his own account.

Lady Valeria Meynell, the grave domestic assured him, was seriously unwell, too unwell to receive anyone. He was evidently a person of discrimination, accustomed to deal with his mistress's clerical callers. Mr. Meynell would see anyone on business for her ladyship any day by appointment. Mr. Meynell was there that evening.

Eustace thanked him hastily, left his card, and departed. He would post the letter before he slept he resolved, with a few lines of explanation that could betray nothing should it fall into the wrong hands. The door closed heavily behind him. It was answered unexpectedly by the clang of an area gate close at hand, and Eustace became aware of a portly female form wearing a black silk gown, and carrying a big basket, emerging from the lower regions of the house, and deliberately wending her way in the same direction as himself.

Mrs. Margetts, the cook, having got the principal features of the dinner off her mind, and leaving the minor details to be filled in by the kitchen-maid, was taking her evening out.

Cook was stout, and the basket heavy, so that she made but slow progress; and Eustace, with a few steps, was able to overtake her.

It would greatly have surprised the good soul if she could have known the shiver of distaste with which the handsome young clergyman forced himself to stop and address her politely.

"You are one of Lady Valeria Meynell's servants, are you not?"

"I am cook at her ladyship's," with an affable smile, shifting the basket to the other arm. "And what may be your object in asking, sir?"

"I want some information about a person who was at the house to-day. I mean no harm by the enquiry. I am a clergyman, and a friend of your mistress. Here is my card. If I apply to Lady Valeria I may make mischief, so I ask you."

Good Mrs. Margetts nodded and blinked at the card. "What sort of a person might you be meaning, sir?" she asked, primly, with pinched lips.

"A youngish woman, dark, about your height, but thinner; with a pale complexion; in a dark cloak—lined with red." The last detail suddenly flashed across his memory.

"O—h—h!" said Mrs. Margetts, with a long-drawn interjection of contempt, as she recognised the description. "Was it *her*, you was meaning?"

"I suppose so. Who was she?"

"Madame Euphrosyne. At least that's what she calls herself."

"I want to know what she is doing at your house."

"Mending lace, that's her trade, or she says so. It's my belief she's one of those who go round corn-cutting and enamelling. Not that *we've* any complexions to make up at *our* house, thank goodness! An uppish young person, with a black bag; who rings the visitors' bell, and won't wait in the hall if it was ever so."

Mr. Stannard nodded comprehension. "How long has she been coming to see Lady Valeria?"

"That's more than I can tell you, sir. It began after Mr. Meynell's death, I know. My lady went to France for a change. It was after she came home that we first saw Madame Euphrosyne about, and she's been coming, on and off, ever since."

Mrs. Margetts began to look enquiringly at the Vicar in her turn, as if expecting some explanation of his interest in the obnoxious young person; and he began to wonder himself what he was driving at by his questions. Beyond the fact that the woman's exit from the house he was interested in had been furtive and odd, he had absolutely no reason for bestowing more notice on her than on any other of Lady Valeria's visitors or tradespeople. He had acted on an impulse, and might end in an utterly wrong position if he went too far.

"Can you tell me where she comes from?"

"Nobody knows, sir. She just comes and goes. She was at our house to-day, about five o'clock. I saw her on the steps, that is to say."

"Thanks." Eustace argued fiercely with his irrational suspicions for a brief space, and then gave in to them.

"I know no harm of the woman, I am bound to say, but I should like to hear more of her. Her address, and any further information you can obtain, is worth a couple of sovereigns to me at any time you like to bring it."

"You shall have it, sir," said Cook, with decision. "A nasty, bold-faced thing!—Not that she comes in my way. I'd let her know! It's the others can't abide her.—You trust to Martha Margetts, sir. You shall have the address as sure as ever is. Good-night, and many thanks, sir." And Martha Margetts and her basket took their way down the next turning.

CHAPTER X.

"THE FAIR QUEEN."

"ONLY a fine lady's freak." So had Mr. Stannard disposed of Mrs. Damien's offer of assistance. It recurred to his mind, however, not many days later, when he paid another visit to the poor lonely little cripple in Lavender Row. Here was a case for a lady's delicate ministration he thought. The good neighbour, Mrs. Beltran, had suddenly, and without farewell or note of warning, disappeared; paying a quarter's rent in advance, and taking the key of her room away with her; and Elsie looked ill and doubly forlorn.

He found his opportunity the next Sunday evening: in the church porch, after service, hastily introduced "Mr. Paramount, my churchwarden," threw in a word of explanation—"Mrs. Damien is desirous of knowing something of St. Fridolin's; I can think of no one better able to assist her than you," and hurried off, his conscience relieved of an obligation. A precise, unhappy-looking, little old gentleman made her a formal little clerkly bow. A gentleman every inch, despite threadbare clothes and patched boots.

"May I ask what sort of information you require?"

"All you can give me," was the comprehensive reply. "First of all, who is this?" And she turned to the pale little daughter hanging on his arm, her great eyes open in astonishment at her father's new and splendid acquaintance.

Mr. Paramount's pinched features relaxed, and a faint frost-bitten smile played round the corners of his mouth. "This is my little girl, Elsie. She belongs to the parish; born and christened here and brought up within the sound of St. Fridolin's bell."

An electric flash of mutual interest and sympathy passed in a look from one fair face to the other before Mrs. Damien spoke again, slowly and with a radiant smile.

"I think I need go no further. I came here to look for a friend and I think I have found one. I want first of all someone to advise me and to help me. Do you think Elsie will?"

Elsie's face flushed with rapture, and her eyes glowed with soft enthusiasm. "What can *I* do?" she breathed in shy, tremulous tones, as she put her hand in the warm, soft clasp that sought it.

Mrs. Damien made her sit beside her on the old oaken bench, and still holding her hand told her her errand. How she was rich, friendless and idle, surrounded at home by rich, many-friended, and well-occupied folk, in no need of her. How chance had brought her to St. Fridolin's, where she fancied a niche might be found for her; to all of which Elsie listened with devotional rapture and Mr. Paramount doubtfully, as savouring of Romish doctrine of self-sacrifice and mortification. Still he would not deny that there was more to do in the Parish than *he* could see way to manage; much that was not in the line of either curate or churchwarden; and, providing there was no nonsense of Guilds or Festivals mixed up in it, he for his part, would have no objection to see it done; which concession gained him such a dazzling sunshiny smile of thanks that his miserable little features melted under it and he beamed in return, and, furthermore, escorted his beautiful new acquaintance to her carriage with quite a dash of youthful gallantry.

So, regardless of weather or calendar, began the summer days of Elsie's life. With Mrs. Damien came the sunshine; new life; new thoughts; new work. It was tonic to the poor child's spirit. Her stunted, under-fed mind grew and expanded, perhaps over-rapidly. Her beauty developed and refined with her mental growth, but took an added touch of wistful sadness. Perhaps with the growing knowledge of life and all that it held came a keener sense of her own cruel limitations.

"Only a fine lady's freak," had repeated the Vicar! but the days of chill October when he first met her passed and November with its fogs followed, and still he knew it lasted. He saw her, sometimes at one of the daily services, sometimes driving through the busy streets, sometimes escorted by de Cressy, making her way into some very dingy regions with the air of being quite at home there.

"Only a fine lady's freak!" he persisted. Came December with its slush and snow. Still the graceful fur-clad figure crossed his path, gay and bright and confident of his sympathy, let his greeting be never so ungenial.

A society paper found its way occasionally to the dull old Georgian mansion, and with much self-contempt he caught himself stopping when he came to a paragraph in which her name might chance to be mentioned. By that he discovered that she was a personage of note in her way; one of last season's beauties who had been painted by an R.A. and been admired by a Royal Highness. A Baltimore beauty of good English birth, and connected by marriage with more than one noble family. The editor indeed was kind enough to speak of her late husband as "poor dear Noel Damien," in quite brotherly fashion, and allude to his love affairs and money difficulties in a style that must have been highly consoling to his widow.

Stories of her sayings and doings, of her charm, her kindliness, her energy, her patience under rebuffs and disappointments—and alas!—of her extravagance, capriciousness, love of excitement, reached him through de Cressy: who, he noticed with grim amusement, had fallen desperately in love with her in his own little odd way—under protest as it were—with a full sense of the uselessness and absurdity of the proceeding.

"A fine lady's freak!" said the Vicar to himself for the last time. The New Year had begun, and a day of premature Spring sunshine was lighting up the land. He stood in the churchyard watching the progress of his Parish Room. The indefinable stir and promise of spring was in the air. The chirpings of the astonished sparrows mingled with the music of the masons' tinkling trowels; and, as the year's first streak of sunshine glanced athwart the smoky slates, Mrs. Damien, with de Cressy beside her, sauntered up to him.

"How fast it grows!" Mrs. Damien was saying, looking at the red brick box before her. "We ought to grow a pear tree up the south side. Or is that too secular? Something ecclesiastic. Would a vine and a fig tree be more correct?"

"We!" Eustace winced with an odd, exasperated, amused, not altogether unpleasant feeling. Before he could analyse it she went on.

"When it is finished I wonder if you would let me have it for an evening every week: to gather my girls in."

"Your girls: what girls have you found in St. Fridolin's?" he asked, rather puzzled.

"All there are," she answered, carelessly. "Out-door workers in the big shops, telephonists, book-binders; I don't know how I came to find them all." She stopped with a certain chilled air of disappointment. She had detected his wandering attention; even a slight frown of impatience. How could she tell that it was impatience with himself for thinking not of her words but of the pretty musical inflections of her sweet voice, of the marvellous gifts of witchery

Heaven showers on women, to be a snare and a stumbling-block in a man's pathway.

He recalled his wandering thoughts instantly and gave his consent without the grace of readiness, then she bade him farewell and turned away.

He stood meditatively a few minutes longer just where she left him, indignantly addressing some mental enquiries to a purely imaginery antagonist. Why was any honest effort for the good of others to be persistently sneered down. Must it not bring its own blessing, however ill-directed? Had not butterflies, idle, mischievous nuisances as he—the antagonist—might be pleased to consider them, their place and work in creation as well as popular preachers? Might not beauty, grace and winning ways prove in the end as great forces for good and evil as zeal, eloquence, or a Double First? What right had anyone to carp and criticise and doubt? Or was it himself that he doubted?

The Vicar cut his meditations short at this point and hurried off to interview his builder.

All this time the Seven of Spades held its place where Arbuthnot Corbett had posted it, with no result, hitherto, except that of affording cause for speculation to the Vicar's visitors and some diversion to Mr. de Cressy.

It was well-known in the parish that from nine till ten o'clock every morning the Vicar's study was free to all comers; and Mrs. Goodliffe, trotting briskly to and fro on household errands was wont to shake her trim little head impatiently at the rabble of unscraped shoes that entered on this invitation. A very motley crew trod in them on one particular dirty morning some weeks later.

"Leave the card up," de Cressy had pleaded. "Just this one hour longer." Then in had come a printer's boy with damaged eyesight wanting an order for some hospital; a slatternly woman with a baby and a claim on some local charity; a decent woman with red eyes, to entreat the Vicar to try and get her husband to join the Blue Ribbon Army. Then a burly "Fellowship Porter" who had taken the ribbon and found it didn't agree with him, to consult on the best means of getting clear of his obligations.

Of each newcomer did de Cressy solemnly demand, "Have you ever seen that card before? Or one like it? Can you offer any suggestion as to how it came to be found in the vestry of St. Fridolin's?" To all of which he received equally solemn and decided negatives. Then came a blank interval and then—Mrs. Damien!

Mr. Stannard rose ceremoniously to greet her, and de Cressy dropped into a chair blushing to the tips of his ears and immersed himself in a pile of reports as demure as a cat in a dairy.

"I have come to say good-bye. I am going away," she began. "A friend of mine—the only relation I have in the world—wants me to go abroad with her and I don't see how I can refuse." She

spoke hesitatingly, almost apologetically de Cressy noticed, and the Vicar listened without response. "I don't know that I am doing any particular good or harm here. Some people may miss me—one or two whom I have been able to help a little."

"St. Fridolin's cannot be expected to be always your first consideration," Mr. Stannard said, constrainedly. "We must be prepared to give way to other and more urgent claims upon you."

She looked at him, her eyes kindling as if in resentment of some latent sneer. "I don't think I quite understand you, or you me, Mr. Stannard. You talk as if I were withdrawing my name from a subscription list. Friendship—kindly sympathy—are what I have found to be most needed wherever I have gone. One can't withdraw such things at a moment's notice, nor make good the withdrawal. Not that I speak from personal experience," she said, with a forced little laugh. "I should have been grateful enough for sympathy and advice myself many a time, if you had found it possible to give it."

"You might have always counted on that!" he answered, warmly. "I cannot imagine why you have ever doubted it." Then stiffly: "Please call upon me for any assistance in my power, whenever it is needed."

De Cressy looked up at him half-indignant, half quizzically. Mrs. Damien bowed frigid thanks.

"Can you spare a few moments to poor Elsie Paramount? I found her distressed beyond all my powers of consolation just now, and brought her here to tell you her troubles."

Mr. Stannard's answer was to prepare to accompany her to the carriage. Mrs. Damien stopped him on the way.

"Be frank with me, Mr. Stannard. Tell me at once what I have done or left undone to offend you?"

"Offend me!" he repeated, confused by this downright attack. "Why should you suppose such a thing."

"Because though you know I leave St. Fridolin's against my will, and only from a sense of duty, you give me no 'God-speed' at parting, no promise of welcome on my return. Because you are less than courteous and more than critical—captious and unjust in your estimate of me."

"No, no. Unjust? As heaven knows, never." His voice grew low, and quivered as with pain. "Oh, forgive me if I have wounded or discouraged you. I have a rough, churlish nature. Will you bear with me a little longer and believe in my good-will?"

"Indeed I will, if you won't be so careful to conceal every trace of its existence for the future," she answered, brightly. "Shall we take a fresh departure and try to be better friends when I come home again? Very good. Now come to Elsie."

Elsie had been watching this little dialogue with painful interest from the carriage, little guessing how small a share she or her concerns had in it. Perceiving that it was ended, she got out slowly and painfully and joined them.

"My child, you should have sent for me," exclaimed Eustace, hastening to help her and bring her in to the Vicarage, where Mrs. Damien left her, followed by de Cressy.

"No. You must not come to our house," replied Elsie, with great solemn eyes of mystery. "Never again. You are in danger, fearful danger, Mr. Stannard, and I have come to warn you."

Her voice shook with the weight of the words she uttered. She fixed her eyes on the Vicar and nodded her head with portentous meaning. He would not have laughed for the world, and looked as much impressed as she could wish.

"I am very sorry to hear that, Miss Paramount. You are a brave little friend to come to my aid. Who is my enemy?"

Her colour came and went, and her thin fingers interlaced themselves nervously. "Oh, I am so sorry and so ashamed!" she broke forth, after a struggle. "It's father!"

Mr. Stannard knitted his brows in dire perplexity. He had a certain liking and much respect for good Mr. Paramount, and was honestly surprised at his antagonism.

"You must be mistaken," he said, gently. "I have never done any harm to your father, and he could do none to me, even if he wished it."

"Oh, but others could," said Elsie, shaking her head with a gloomy triumph, "if he chose to make them. He says there's law, and the Bishop can help him."

"My dear child," Eustace began impatiently, then checked himself. "Mr. Paramount is too good a man to do me any wilful wrong, I am sure, and I promise you solemnly I will do none to him. I am just as grateful to you as if there had been real danger, though."

"And are you sure nothing very dreadful is going to happen?" asked Elsie, with rather a disappointed inflection in her voice.

"Nothing. Now cheer up, and like a wise little girl try and tell me if there is anything I can do to show him how much I wish to be friends."

"If it wasn't for the Galleries!" sighed she.

"What Galleries? Do you mean those in the Church? They are unsafe you know. They ought to have been renewed or pulled down years ago."

"He won't believe it!" she went on more disconsolately. "He says it's all of a piece with the rest of the Innovations—'the thin end of the wedge;' and the—the Doles and the bread."

"I imputed no dishonesty to him or anyone, you may remember; but I should have been wanting in common honesty myself if I had not called attention to the scandalous misappropriation of the parish charities. Don't you see that?"

"It cast reflections on father all the same," deplored Elsie, aggravatingly obtuse. Then suddenly melting: "Don't think too hardly of father, please, sir. I think sometimes—" and her voice sank into an

awed whisper, "his troubles must have gone to his head. He never did such a thing before—to spend his evenings in a public house—and such a low one! The Blue Dog—Oh, Mr. Stannard!" The poor little maid's voice quavered, and her head sank.

"What troubles?" he asked, for he saw her heart was full.

"Sam's lost his place. His last chance; and the firm won't overlook it. Indeed—indeed it was not his fault *this* time."

"How did it happen?" asked the Vicar, gravely.

"Some drunken men frightened a woman on Monday night, and she gave Sam into custody. She said it was a mistake next day, but ——"

"If Sam had been safe at home the mistake needn't have happened. This is the third situation he has lost since I came here, is it not?"

"The fourth," admitted the poor little sister, "and all through no real fault, sir!"

"Losing letters, unpunctuality, difficulties with the police, and playing the fool in office hours may be a man's misfortune, but they are at least not unavoidable ones," was the dry comment. It overthrew Elsie's last vestige of self-control.

"Oh, don't, don't, please, sir! It must be my fault. I've done my best since mother died, but I can't make our home what it ought to be, and that's what's driving them both wrong. We've all gone wrong since mother died!" The sobs would be stayed no longer, and she burst into a tempest of grief.

He cast about for some words of consolation. Before the first could pass his lips, with startling abruptness the storm ceased. Elsie struggled bolt upright in her chair, her little wet ball of a pocket-handkerchief arrested midway to her eyes, swallowing down the last half of a sob, and staring at something above him, the picture of consternation.

"What is it? Why, you can't know anything about *that*, Miss Paramount?" he exclaimed, for her startled gaze was fixed full upon the Seven of Spades.

"How did it come there?" she gasped.

"That is what I want to know. Did you ever see it before?"

"Never!" she replied, emphatically. "It was lost from the pack."

"Where was it lost? I know where it was found."

"At our house," she began; then the recollection of all the circumstances flashed across her mind, and she came to a stop with an imploring look in her eyes, and her cheeks hotly blushing. She turned away her head with a little deprecating gesture that pleaded so eloquently with him to spare her further questioning that he felt he could not persist. "You must not keep Mrs. Damien longer," he said, "and half the parish are waiting to see me. Good-bye, and thank you for your kind thought of me."

"That question is answered," he observed to de Cressy, presently;

"and answered as I expected. A relic of young Sam Paramount's presence. His sister recognised it directly. I might have guessed whose pocket it came from."

"Well, I should not have thought it of the boy. He doesn't go in for that line of mischief ——"

"Besides he's so uncommonly useful in your Amateur Orchestral Society, eh? I ought to have known better than to disparage the one Clarinet to the conductor." And with a laugh Eustace tore the card across and dropped it in the wastepaper basket.

Then in came an archæologist waiting to explore; a genteel female with a questionable petition and subscription list; two girls to give in their names for Confirmation; a converted gas-fitter with a Mission —also a new patent burner to sell; a lay-helper for instructions; and a rosy errand-boy out of breath to pay a friendly call, and thank the Vicar for getting him his place. He was the last, except the postman, and when he too had departed, and the clock struck the hour, forth sallied Mrs. Goodliffe triumphantly, and ordering maid and broom to the front, saw the steps restored to their pristine fairness.

The bells began to ring for the morning service, but they fell unheeded on Eustace's ears. He had closed his door gently on the last comer, and shut himself in with his thoughts. He had done with them now—these intruders from without, who had pressed in with their paltry needs between him and the gracious memory of her presence, just as their footsteps had trampled out the trace hers might have left. He noted the very spot on his bare deal table where her slim gloved hand had rested. From the dusky shadow of her hat, two bright eyes seemed to shine out reproachfully on him. The scent of the red rose nestling against her white throat still lingered in the air.—What was that lying at his feet? The very rose, crushed and trodden out of all loveliness, where she had dropped it. He picked it up and held it—not with a lover's touch, but with a secret passionate grip like a stolen gem, his breath coming quickly, and his eyes gleaming almost fiercely.

Then he did a curious thing. Kneeling before his fire, very tenderly he plucked leaf by leaf away, dropping them one by one into the heart of the glowing embers, watching them shrivel and vanish in faint, white filmy ashes, till nought remained but the crushed and battered calyx. He looked at it greedily as it lay on his open palm. "Not even this, except of her own free gift." He spoke under his breath, but even as he spoke he bent and kissed it—once—twice, and then dropped it with the rest.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GIFT OF THE RED FLOWER.

On the day on which this story opened, the finger of some meddling Fate twining and twisting the life threads that had till then been running so smoothly apart, caught one stray filament, hitherto floating aimlessly, and tangled it into the web.

Elsie Paramount woke to her work-a-day world next morning with a curious sense that all life had changed somehow; or her point of view, perhaps. She opened her eyes to the same ugly little den of a bed-room, kept spotlessly clean and trim at a daily cost of such painful toil as many a fine lady never knows from season's end to season's end, and limped forth from it, white and frail, to the old monotonous round of work.

She found the little parlour newly swept, the kettle filled and the fire lighted. That was graceless Sammy's work. His feckless hands could be as deft as a woman's in her behalf. What remained to be done cost her many a slow journey from corner cupboard to table, and from table to fire-place, but the breakfast was ready at last, all in the exact order of the good old days before "Mother's" strong arms and brisk feet lay at rest for ever.

Then she went to the open window where her pots of mignonette stood, over-hung by the scarlet-runners of Sampson's training, and leant out to see above the blank wall that bounded her horizon "whether the sky looked blue to-day." As she did so, a sound overhead made her start. The ponderous creak of the great wooden window-shutter. Mrs. Beltran must have come home. Elsie felt a sudden pang of remorse as she thought how little she had missed her during the six months she had been away, and how little wishful she was ever to see her again.

The little clock in the corner struck; a brisk step was heard outside, and old Mr. Paramount appeared, spruce and well-brushed, if somewhat thread-bare at knees and elbows, with his cravat neatly tied, and his square-toed boots resplendent.

"Good-morning, my dear. Have you slept well? You are looking better, I think." His invariable formula, from which Elsie never dissented. Then out of the big Bible and worn little book of prayers which she had laid beside his plate, he conducted a short service, of which graceless Sammy only received the benefit of the concluding half as he slunk into his seat near the door, to be greeted by a curt "Good-morning, sir," as they sat down to breakfast.

This was to-day an embarrassed, uncomfortable meal. Mr. Paramount stirred his tea viciously, snapped at his bacon, and kept his eyes averted from the unwelcome prodigal who ate and drank in a deprecating, apologetic fashion, helped himself to butter furtively, and

refused another cup of tea with a look that took away Elsie's last pretence of appetite.

"Father," she said, driven in desperation to break the thunder-charged silence. "Have you heard? Mrs. Damien asked Sampson last night to play his clarinet at her party next Monday. She says she can find no one else to do it so well, and I'm to go and hear him!"

"Delighted, I'm sure," in a sour little tone. "It's great news for me to hear that there's an opening for Sampson *anywhere*."

"Now, father!" pleaded Elsie.

"I'm going to try Vaux and Vidler's again," humbly suggested the prodigal. "Young Mr. Vidler said he'd see what he could do."

"It's your last chance, I warn you. I have stretched *my* influence to the utmost limits; you must go your own way if this fails," spoke his father, sternly.

"If I only might!" broke out Sammy, with a hopeful look. "See here father, I know it's partly my own fault ——"

"Partly!" with a venomous sneer.

"Well, altogether then; but a man isn't born a clerk—even a bad one; and I've no hope of ever making a good one; and I hate—oh, how I *hate* the city! More than I can tell. I want fresh air. I want room to use my arms and legs. I only feel a man when I'm out with my company."

"Playing at soldiers," was the acrid comment.

"Let me make it earnest then!" pleaded the boy. "There's fighting coming, everyone says so, in Egypt, if not with France, and I should be worth something then. I know my drill. I shouldn't be a raw recruit ——"

Sam stopped, for his father had sunk back in his chair, his little grey eyes expanded in horror, and his whole face convulsed with the effort to gasp out indignation too mighty for speech.

"You mean enlist!" he at last exploded. "A son of mine—enlist!"

"Why not?" said Sammy, hurrying up his arguments. "I should at least earn food and clothing, which I can't do now; and besides—" out of Sam's pocket came a well-thumbed pamphlet with "RECRUITING," "BY AUTHORITY," conspicuous on its first page—"I could get four shillings a day as a regimental clerk."

"Be quiet, sir! Be *quiet*, I say!" shouted Mr. Paramount.

"Fifteen shillings eventually as a Quartermaster!" shouted Sammy, louder.

"*Will* you be silent!" choking with wrath.

"Fifty pounds a month as a deputy commissary in India and the rank of captain—or if I *didn't* go to India and can pass the exam. and get recommended by my commanding officer—and see if I don't do one and the other—I may get a commission just the same. Here it is in print. See it for yourself. Captain! Major! Colonel! General! Why not I as well as another?" And Sammy breathless, and at the

end of his ammunition, held out the pamphlet to his father, whose only reply was to plunge forward and strike it down, while an impious ejaculation, the first that had ever escaped those respectable lips, came crashing forth with vigour, making Elsie start and shiver and Sammy feel that things were getting serious indeed.

Mr. Paramount sank back in his chair panting and glaring, as much in horror at his own profanity as anything else. "You're driving me mad between you!" he broke out again wrathfully. "What have I done to bring this on my old age. I that have toiled and slaved to keep you all respectable! My boy turns from me to herd with the scum of the earth, and my girl sides with him against her poor old father!"

The poor old man's voice dropped into a shaky, miserable quaver. Elsie's tears had been quietly falling into her untasted tea for some moments, and now she sobbed aloud, rending Sammy's affectionate heart to the core.

"Don't cry, Birdie. I'll give it up. There," tossing the obnoxious pamphlet into the fender, "that's at an end. And now for Vaux and Vidler's." He gave himself a shake, half-sullen, half-desperate; and while the old man brushed his shabby hat with trembling hands: "It's what it must come to, dear, if I'm to be good for anything in this world," he whispered as he kissed her.

Day after day passed and Mrs. Beltran made no sign.

Elsie knew she was there, and wondered a little, but was content. She never felt lonely now. She had fine company of her own who used to come to visit her in the long still afternoon hours when the work of the house was done, and kind motherly Mrs. Ridge, who sometimes looked in to help her, had said good-bye. In the window stood her invalid couch, Mrs. Damien's gift, the only one of any value she had ever ventured to bestow; and, once laid on its elastic springs with her aching limbs supported at the easiest angle, Elsie used to feel each day as if lifted by the mighty arms of some strong angel into another world. Her great work-basket stood beside her, and endless lengths of plain sewing passed between her fingers, but the real Elsie was not there. She was off and away to her real home, in the fine air-built castle that stood in Fancyland; that wondrous land where all the knights are brave and all the ladies fair; where she was no longer lame, awkward, or shabby; where she loved and feared, suffered and dared with the best of them, till some stroke of the clock or a neighbour's voice, or maybe a twinge of pain brought her suddenly back to Lavender Row, to be poor little Elsie Paramount again.

There was a new face amongst her dream heroes now, a new presence that made all beside him show faint—colourless—unreal. "'A true knight sworn to vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, and loving, utter faithfulness in love,'" quoted Elsie to herself. "He is Sir Galahad—no, Sir Geraint" (possibly reflecting that amongst the

Spotless Knight's merits that of being an ornament to society was not specified). "Geraint must have had blue eyes and a fair moustache and a way of moving about 'the dusky-raftered many-cobwebbed hall' that made 'Enid at her lowly handmaid-work feel it a joy to serve so great a prince.' Geraint might have picked up Enid's flowers with 'Here are your roses, they are too pretty to lose'—the poor common hedgerow blossoms."

And Enid. Enid had *her* toilette difficulties, it was some consolation to remember. Elsie pondered much over some treasured morsels of mother's finery, wondering how smart she might make herself without appearing presumptuous. The invitation to Mrs. Damien's, enough in itself in the ordinary course of things to cause her a delight too great to realise, had now become almost awful with suggestions of what might or might not befal her there. Then came a well-remembered, soft, imperative tap on the door, and Geraint, Enid and their glorious company took to flight incontinently.

It was Mrs. Beltran at last, somewhat thin and careworn but cheery of bearing as of yore, who glided in and took up her old place beside the couch.

"Are you glad to see me again, little one?"

Elsie's faltered greeting was almost ungracious in its awkwardness; but Mrs. Beltran took no notice, only contemplated her through her narrowed eyelids with her dark inscrutable smile.

"This is my den that I crawl home to when the cruel world has ill-treated and got the best of me. I come here to rest and lie low till better times. What have you there? Lace? Let me see it."

Elsie handed her the fichu she had been mending. Mrs. Beltran gave a visible shudder at the clumsiness of the unfinished darn.

"Old Limerick point, and good of its kind," she pronounced. "Where did you get it?"

She had already pulled out her pocket work-case and was tenderly cutting and drawing out Elsie's unskilful stitches.

Elsie watched and admired while she stretched the torn lace over a stiff piece of glazed stuff and, mounting a quaint, battered, gold embossed thimble on her finger, caught revelled thread and broken mesh together with rapid dexterity. She could talk as well as work too, and Elsie could not but respond. The injured spray grew again under the swift needle, and Elsie, led on by sympathetic question and remark, had told the story of the last few months, with but one reservation, before it was done.

After all what did it matter? It was such a beautiful story. Mrs. Damien might perhaps barely have recognised the idealised sketch of herself and her mission which she drew. Mrs. Beltran apparently did, though, which was curious.

"And Mr.—what—Poynter?—is her last lover?"

"Why do you say that?" asked Elsie in a faint little voice.

"Poor wretch! How can a moth keep out of the candle? He is

bound to scorch and die, and what the better is the candle?" she mused with an air of philosophic enquiry.

"Don't talk so please," pleaded the girl with pained earnestness. "She is so good and so—I am sure— is he. It would be a *beautiful* thing for them to love one another."

"Let them. Now, look at the gift I have brought for you," and she placed a rough wood box in Elsie's hands.

Inside, on a bed of cotton-wool, lay a hard, green, unopened bud, in shape like that of a large passion flower. It had a slight spicy perfume, but the petals were fast bound in their green sheath. The girl looked puzzled. "Will it ever bloom?"

"Perhaps, yes; perhaps, no; only for one night. It is called the Flower of Good Luck in the country where they grow. The girls say it is a charm to bring your lover to you, or to gain your wish from him. Keep it and see. It may never open."

Elsie lay back smiling to herself. She felt Mrs. Beltran's caressing hand on her forehead once or twice. Her eyes closed languidly, her breathing grew more measured, and at last she slept. One little hand lay palm upwards beside her, the other had mechanically lifted itself and was lightly clasped on her breast.

Mrs. Beltran lifted it cautiously, and with scant ceremony deliberately unfastened the shabby black gown. A ribbon encircled Elsie's white throat, and was tucked in among the folds of her under-clothing. She twitched it forth and with it a small silken bag. A smile of utter contempt curled Mrs. Beltran's mobile lips while she examined the contents; a tiny cross made from two rough morsels of brier fastened by a silver thread, and some dry shrivelled petals. She replaced it, fastened the dress and lifted the hand into its former position, and then quietly resumed her work, contemplating the girl at intervals with her dark expressionless gaze, with much the air of a chess-player who, finger on piece, decides on his next move—pawn, queen, queen's knight? The problem was a complicated one and the moves many, but she seemed to see her game at last, and with a meditative smile put aside her lace and standing beside the couch laid her hand on Elsie's forehead. "The Fair Prince," she said softly, and noiselessly stole away.

So there came a night when Elsie found the dull green bud changed into a splendid scarlet bloom—rich-coloured, heavy-scented, beyond anything she had ever seen or imagined, and straightway deciding what gift it should bring her, pinned it on her heart to give her courage for the asking.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIGER'S CLAW.

"I WISH I were a duke's wife!" observed Mrs. Damien, so fervently and seriously that Hester Archdale burst into the merriest little peal of laughter in reply.

"My dear Rose! Perhaps you might be if you tried—but why? Is this an outbreak of philanthropy in a new direction, or what? And is it a duke in the abstract, or somebody I ought to know?" And she lazily extended her hand and extracted "Dod" from the dwarf book-shelf at her elbow.

It was the witching hour of confidences. The warm summer twilight was softly closing in. The day's routine was over and the serious business of evening toilette might yet be righteously shirked a while.

"I don't mean anybody in that wretched book, Hester. Of course not! What I did mean—though I did not put it clearly—was, I should like to be a duchess."

"Oh, I see. Yes. That's quite another thing isn't it?" said Hester, in an enlightened tone. "But still, the duke seems to come even into that arrangement, somehow. As a means, if not an end."

"To be one of the English ladies who are born to lesser royalties, who belong to the soil, as it were, who have a people of their own with hereditary claims on them."

"Hereditary bondsmen!" interrupted Hester, scornfully. "Am I never to find an American who doesn't yearn to be a feudal tyrant?"

Mrs. Damien disdained to argue that point. "Ah," she broke off impatiently. "You English at home seem incapable of realising half the poetry and beauty that have drifted down into your lives from the old-world days."

"There isn't a duke available," pronounced Hester, tossing away her red book; "but I can tell you what will do as well, if it's a good old-fashioned, healthy despotism that your soul craves. Be a country rector's wife. There's nothing autocratic going that can touch that nowadays."

Mrs. Damien received the suggestion in silence. "Who are coming to-night?" asked Hester, taking a fresh departure.

"Mr. Lepell and Lady Beatrix. Lady Monchalsea refused."

"Haven't you quarrelled finally with her yet, Rose? Your patience and long-suffering is a marvel."

"She is dreadfully exacting and capricious!" Rose admitted sadly; "but she is all I have in the world of kith and kin, and you know I feel I am obeying my father in trying to repay the Monchalseas all they once did for him. I used to think she really cared for me, too, at one time. It would have been so easy for her *not* to have found

me out and made friends with me at Florence. I wonder what made her insist on my coming to England at all?"

"I know—perfectly," with a nod of dark meaning, "and so did Lord Monchalsea. Likewise his creditors. Never mind. She was a very excellent sponsor for you on your first appearance in English society—a gay old countess with plenty of money. Now that you have seen the folly of it all, and *haven't* married a duke—or Lord Monchalsea—you can throw her over and fall back upon me. I'm a far safer friend."

"I can't give her up now. She really does depend on me, and I was glad enough to meet her once. I thought my life was over, and she seemed to offer me a fresh beginning. I longed so much to get rid of the past. Think of the years I had spent in the shadow of death—and worse—" she ended in a shuddering whisper.

Hester knew she was thinking, not only of her lost parents, but of the short year of her own married life; the wretched story of a child-bride sacrificed by her father's ambition to the fancy of a cynical, worn-out man of the world, whose life and death were alike unedifying and best forgotten. "Tell me who else are coming," she went on, without looking round.

"Mr. de Cressy, Lord Charles and Mabel Brant ——"

"That means the Beethoven Septett is to be done after all! How have you managed about the clarinet—or have you come down to the Mozart in A.?"

"I think Mabel will be content with my forlorn hope. He has practised with Mr. de Cressy's society, and as no other clarinet-player was to be had ——"

"Do you mean to say you've got young Paramount?" Hester exclaimed, turning on her with wide-open eyes.

"Why not? He seemed delighted to come in just for the Septett. You know we have to get a professional for the horn, that's beyond any of our amateurs; so where's the harm?"

"Oh, none whatever. If everybody is content, so am I. Only don't turn the boy's head altogether, as ——"

"Go on, you hadn't finished. Turn his head as——?"

"As you and the Vicar have done for his sister, I was going to say. I shall expect to meet *her* here next."

"Perhaps you may," Mrs. Damien answered, a little confusedly, "for I have asked her to come and hear her brother's performance. What *can* it matter, Hester? Can't the girl sit in a corner and listen to a little music without being any the worse? Or why do you grudge her such a tiny scrap of pleasure?"

Hester was silent for a minute. "I believe mean jealousy is at the bottom of it all! I was just thinking over all the people I have been attacking and disparaging in the last half-hour. Mr. Stannard, Lady Monchalsea, Elsie Paramount—everybody you happen to honour with your special notice, Rose, my dear. *Now* you have the key to my

character. But I think in this last case I have some reason, though I can't tell what it is. Perhaps it's only instinct, but it seems to make me mistrustful and uneasy. I wish Elsie were not coming. That girl is my evil genius; I felt it from the first."

"She can't do you much harm in half-an-hour. Aunt Mamie is to take care of her till Sampson's performance comes off, and she will leave directly after, so I hope the danger from her society is reduced to a minimum."

"I wish she would stay away," Hester repeated, obstinately; "but let her rest now. Who else did you say?"

"My prima donna, Fraulein von Kreifeldt, and Mr. Poynter."

"Ah!" with a hypocritical sigh of sham apprehension, "don't I know what that portends. He'll be sent in to dinner with me, of course, and my life will be one long struggle to save you all from being swamped in shop, unless you can put him and Daddy out of conversation range."

"What affectation! As if you didn't revel in shop yourself and weren't a perfect regimental record. Don't despair; he mayn't think the entertainment worth the journey from Shorncliffe, and we shall get an apologetic note to-morrow to say he has missed his train or been sent on detachment duty somewhere."

Neither fate had, however, befallen Edric. No more had been heard of the orders for Portsmouth, and he was at that moment speeding comfortably townwards, trying to calculate whether he should be too early or too late in arriving at St. Maur Road.

He contrived to be punctual to the hour named, and followed the broad back of an over-coat which he seemed dimly to recognise up the steps.

The over-coat proved to contain Sir John Archdale, who greeted Edric in a most fatherly fashion and introduced him over again to "my little girl Hester," whom they found the sole occupant of the drawing-room. Miss Hester was in a white gown with a yellow sash and knots of golden pansies about it. "What a bright little creature," was Edric's thought as her laughing glance met his, and her shapely little brown hand was extended as her father said "One of 'Ours,' Hetty." But that was all he thought—for—enter his goddess on a rosy cloud—otherwise Mrs. Damien in a Worth gown—and poor Hester passed into neutral tinted shadow.

The next arrivals were a tall, distinguished-looking man, with a picturesque beard and untidy garments, accompanied by a pretty wife with expressive eyes and the tints of a Greuze.

"Connections of Mrs. Damien's. Lady Beatrix was a Boughton, a daughter of the Countess of Monchalsea," Miss Archdale explained to him, with open eyes of astonishment at his ignorance. "Not know Lepell, the artist and art-critic, who writes such exquisite *vers de société* and is the All England tennis champion?"

"Can't say I do, in any capacity. What has he painted?"

Hester knitted her pretty brows consideringly. "Nothing that you are likely to know. His theory is that art should be the outcome of all imaginable perfection in every other line. An artist should be poet, actor, athlete, orator, and ever so much more before he can paint anything."

"And he hasn't worked himself up to the painting yet. I see."

Then in came de Cressy brisk and friendly; and then an interval of waiting that Edric would gladly have seen prolonged into all Eternity; for Mrs. Damien called him to her side with a wave of her great flower-fan and introduced him to Lady Beatrix, and dropped him some golden syllables and a priceless smile or two. Then, with a rush as of a whirlwind there entered a tall, wild-looking lady in trailing, somewhat bedraggled garments of fiercest terra-cotta, who stood peering up and down for a second, through the nippers perched on her aquiline nose. Her bodice was laced crookedly, her fuzzy, light locks had evidently been arranged without the aid of maid or looking-glass, and the two hands which she extended to her hostess with an impetuous rush were cased in long gloves, three-quarters unbuttoned.

"Rose, my darling, don't frown on me! I know I'm ever so late. Don't wait for Charlie. I ought to have told you before that he couldn't possibly come. There's a division to-night, and goodness knows when he'll get back from the House. I know you'll forgive him—when it's a question of saving the country from shipwreck—! And oh, my dear! *Is* it all right about the clarinet?"

"Set your mind at rest, the Septett is saved—whatever becomes of the country," Mrs. Damien replied reassuringly, and then dinner was at last announced.

The dinner was 'an interesting one'—or so Lady Beatrix, Edric's other neighbour, pronounced. It had a few quaint and original transatlantic touches about it, which she pointed out with an air of a connoisseur; but it was all one to Edric—the repast of the Barmecide, or the Feast of Jewels that deluded the Emperor Hwang-te. His happiness had got into his head like new wine.

His love you see was not a deep, fierce, seething passion, but only a boyish gladsomeness in the sunlight of his dear lady's presence; a great joy in serving her; a great loss where she was not. The events of the evening were likewise enveloped for him in the same golden haze of unreality.

There was music, he remembered; something unusually good he believed; but even had his attention been free, it would have been wasted on him, his taste being decidedly rudimentary. He 'liked music,' in a vague, uncritical fashion—that is he listened if any tune caught his fancy—and if it didn't he paid no attention.

He recognised "the Septett" by there being seven performers; Lady Charles Brant rising violin in hand preparing to lead. There was a big, blushing, broad-shouldered youth in morning dress who

came in rather sheepishly, clarinet in hand, he remarked. Then during the preliminary fluttering of music-sheets, screwing and twisting and tuning, and arrangement and disarrangment of lights, he found two ladies standing near him, chairless, and vacated his place. He sauntered away through the other drawing-room to the conservatory beyond, cool and dim, with a fountain dropping musically on to broad water-lily leaves and a tall red bird holding a light aloft amongst fan-palms and orange trees. Just within the doorway a young girl rested on a long, low garden-chair. A slight, white figure, whose great starry eyes seemed to meet his with a look of expectation as he entered. She bowed hurriedly and awkwardly, looking away before he could return the recognition.

He had seen her before, he knew, somewhere; but where? How pretty she was; how wonderfully pretty, even to eyes filled with the splendour of Rose's brilliant beauty. A shadowy, transparent, delicate prettiness, owing its charm to the subtle changes of light and shade that flitted across her sensitive face. How well the dead white of her gown suited her, with its quaint old-fashioned cut, and the crimson flower nestling amongst the folds of soft muslin and filmy lace. How distressed she had looked at his stupidity in not recognising her. Why wouldn't she look again and give him the chance? Her shyness seemed to shroud her like a veil, he thought.

Aunt Mamie was standing near her and bestowed a friendly nod and a gleaming grin upon him. As she did so, the scene at St. Fridolin's flashed before him. "Miss Paramount!" he said half to himself, and the delicate little face turned to his all alight with pleasure.

He drew a seat near her in silence, for the music was beginning and they listened without speaking for a few moments.

"That's my brother Sampson!" she said, with shy pride; "the one who played the clarinet solo—Mrs. Damien was kind enough to ask me here to hear him"—then afraid she had been forward, Elsie shrank into herself in an agony of bashfulness.

Edric made a civil remark about Sampson's performance presently. She was touching the red flower lightly with her finger tips, and stealing a look at him at intervals, blushing as red as its petals. Her lips parted once as if to speak, and then closed again in a little nervous tremor. He began to be interested, and to wonder what she had to say to him. At last the music finally ceasing, he caught her eyes with a look of such open interrogation that it forced a response.

"Mrs. Damien said I might ask you—" she faltered, and this preliminary was sufficient to command at once his prompt attention—"how to go into the army."

"From Sandhurst do you mean, or through the Militia?" he queried, slightly puzzled.

"Oh, no! Not as a gentleman like you would go in," she hastened to explain, more fluttered than ever. "I mean people like us—to be common soldiers."

"People like you, Miss Paramount,"—with a struggle for gravity—"who are bent on enlisting, have nothing to do but to find the nearest recruiting sergeant, and the matter is settled. Have you a fancy for any particular regiment? No. Then I should recommend my own, the Royal Denbigh, the most distinguished ever known, and certain of foreign service immediately."

"Does that mean fighting?—abroad?"

"Yes, but don't be alarmed; you'll be kept at the depôt for a year first, to learn your drills and to shoot ——"

"But he won't like that. He is a very good shot now. He's been a volunteer these two years and knows his drill quite well."

"And he's more than twenty? That will make a difference. It will be uncommonly unpleasant—the life, I mean, and the associates."

"They can't be worse than the City. He's always getting led away. Father says it's music and the choir practice does it."

"Brother, or sweetheart, which is it?" Edric wondered. But here Lady Charles Brant struck the first notes of the accompaniment of her song and they were perforce silent.

It was a quaint little Irish love-ditty with a sad minor refrain to the laughing line of each verse; gladsome yet full of presage of sorrow. Elsie's long eyelashes closed as in weariness, but Edric noticed the tremor of her delicate lips.

"Sweetheart, it must be. Gone wrong I'm afraid," was his conclusion.

Lady Charles's song struck him as "very pretty," very nicely sung, that was all. How should he guess how every syllable of its gladsomeness, dropping into sudden foreboding, thrilled the poor sensitive child beside him with a passion of uncomprehended longing, or touched her with an exquisite anguish almost too deep for tears.

The song ended. Elsie had taken the red flower from her breast and was holding it clasped in her two hands. Her eyes shone, and she spoke in feverish, desperate haste.

"Will you help him, sir? If he comes to you from me."

Edric smiled his kindliest on her. "I don't know that I can do much, but I'll do my best gladly for Mrs.—for *your* sake," he blundered, afraid of the remark as it was first slipping from his lips appearing too pointed. Hester Archdale came up just as he rose from his place.

"Your brother has sent me for you, Elsie, the carriage is at the door. You must not go before you choose, though. Is there anything else you would care to stay to hear?" Hester was determinedly gracious by way of amends for her unreasonable antagonism.

"No, I should like to go now. It has all been so beautiful, so wonderful!" she said, under her breath, in a tone of soft rapture.

Hester was going to offer her arm, but Edric interposed, and led the girl to the staircase, where her brother took her into his care; and Aunt Mamie joined them with a pile of wraps.

Hester and Edric lingered awhile on the landing, watching the little procession depart out into the night; Elsie, in her white gown, looking like a little phantom in the June moonlight, beside Aunt Mamie's stalwart dark figure. Edric thought he would tell Hester about Elsie's appeal. It came natural to tell Hester everything that happened somehow. They seemed to have been friends of quite old standing by this time. Aunt Mamie's return prevented him.

"Mis'r Poynter, sah! Dis fo' you." And she extended a silver salver to him. On it lay something loosely folded in a piece of soft Japanese silk. Not made into a parcel, only wrapped in a few loose twists, as if for temporary concealment.

"For me?" said Edric, looking at it with wonder and sudden unaccountable distaste. "What can it be?"

He took it from the salver, and his question was answered as his fingers closed on it. Through all the soft yellow folds his fingers could distinguish the hard curve and cruel point of the Tiger's Claw!

He loosed his hold of the silk, and something fell glittering down to Hester's feet. Before he could prevent her, she had stooped and picked it up. "What is this?" she asked, and then as she raised her eyes to his face he saw that she knew.

"Pusson out dar gimme him, Miss Hester. Wait fo' de ansah, sah!"

"Say I will come," spoke Edric, and Aunt Mamie departed.

He almost snatched the token from Hester's hand. "The end of the story has come, you see," he said, forcing a laugh. "Now I shall look for the fulfilment of your prophecies."

"Don't go!" broke from Hester's lips in spite of herself; "or let someone go with you. I don't like it ——"

"Nor do I," replied Edric, standing frowning and drawing the yellow handkerchief through and through his hands. A subtle, dead-sweet perfume exhaled from it. With an exclamation of disgust, he threw it down and shook his fingers as if to clear them of the clinging odour. Then he suddenly picked it up again.

"I'll not leave that ugly trace behind me. Faugh! What a hateful scent! No, I don't like it either, Miss Archdale. I'd much rather stay here for the rest of the evening. But it's got to be done, don't you see? I won't try to say good-bye to Mrs. Damien. Tell her—anything; I leave it to you ——"

He was unconsciously holding her slim brown fingers in his as he spoke. "I'm frightened," she whispered, as she drew them away.

"Why? It's quite respectably early in the evening yet, not eleven! And don't you think I can take care of myself? I'll come and tell you all about it." And he ran lightly down the staircase, turning on the last step to smile a cheery farewell.

(To be continued.)

A TRAGEDY.

THOMAS CHANDLER possessed a clear, retentive memory by nature, and he had done nothing to cloud it. After his master, Lawyer Paul—soon to be no longer his master but his partner—had gone out with Mr. Preen to make enquiries at the post-office for the missing letter, he sat down to bring his memory into exercise.

Carrying his thoughts back to the Wednesday afternoon, some ten days ago, when the letter ought to have been delivered at Mr. Paul's office, and was not—at least, so far as could be traced at present—he had little difficulty in recalling its chief events, one remembered incident leading up to another.

Then he passed into the front room, and spoke for some minutes with Michael Hanborough, a steady little man of middle age, who had been with Mr. Paul over twenty years. There was one clerk under him, Tite Batley (full name Titus), and there had been young Richard MacEveril. The disappearance of the latter had caused the office to be busy just now, Michael Hanborough especially so. He was in the room alone when Mr. Chandler entered.

"You have not gone to tea yet, Mr. Hanborough!"

"No, sir. I wanted to finish this deed first. Batley's gone to his."

"Look here, Hanborough, I want to ask you a question or two. That deed's in no particular hurry, for I am sure Mr. Paul will not be ready to send it off to-day," continued Mr. Chandler. "There's going to be a fuss over that letter of Preen's, which appears to have been unaccountably lost. I have been carrying my thoughts back to the Wednesday afternoon when it ought to have been delivered here, and I want you to do the same. Try and recollect anything and everything you can, connected with that afternoon."

"But, Mr. Chandler, the letter could not have been delivered here; Mr. Paul says so," reasoned Michael Hanborough, turning from his desk while he spoke and leaning his elbow upon it.

His desk stood between the window and the door which opened from the passage; the window being at his right hand as he sat. Opposite, beside the other window, was Mr. Chandler's desk. A larger desk, used by MacEveril and young Batley, crossed the lower end of the room, facing the window; and near it was the narrow door that opened to Mr. Paul's room.

Thomas Chandler remained talking with Hanborough until he saw the lawyer and Mr. Preen return, when he joined them in the other room. They mentioned their failure at the post-office, and he then related to them what he had been able to recall.

Wednesday afternoon, the sixteenth of June, had been distinguished

in Mr. Paul's office by a little breeze raised by Richard MacEveril. Suddenly looking up from his writing, he disturbed Mr. Chandler, who was busy at his desk, by saying he expected to have holiday on the morrow for the whole day. Hanborough was just then in Mr. Paul's room; Batley was out. Batley had been sent to execute a commission at a distance, and would not be back till evening.

"Oh, indeed!" responded Tom Chandler, laughing at MacEveril's modest request, so modestly put. "What else would you like, Dick?"

Dick laughed too. "That will serve me for the present moment, Mr. Chandler," said he.

"Well, Dick, I'm sorry to deny you, but you can't have it. You have a conscience to ask it, young man, when you know the Worcester Sessions are close at hand, and we are so busy here we don't know which way to turn!"

"I mean to take it," said Dick.

"But I don't mean you to; understand that. See here, Dick: I won't be harder than I'm obliged; I should like to get to the pic-nic myself, though there's no chance of that for me. Come here in good time in the morning, get through as much work as you can, and I dare say we can let you off at one o'clock. There!"

This concession did not satisfy MacEveril. When Mr. Hanborough came in from the other room he found the young man exercising his saucy tongue upon Tom Chandler, calling him a "Martinet," a "Red Indian Freebooter," and other agreeable names, which he may have brought with him from Australia. Tom, ever sweet-tempered, took it all pleasantly, and bade him go on with his work.

That interlude passed. At half-past-four o'clock MacEveril went out, as usual, to get his tea, leaving Chandler and Hanborough in the office, each writing at his own desk. Presently the former paused; looked fixedly at the mortgage-deed he was engaged upon, and then got up to carry it to the old clerk. As he was crossing the room the postman came in, put a small pile of letters into Mr. Chandler's hand, and went out again. Tom looked down at the letters but did not disturb them; he laid them down upon Mr. Hanborough's desk while he showed him the parchment.

"I don't much like this one clause, Hanborough," he said. "Just read it; it's very short. Would it be binding on the other party?"

They were both reading the clause, heads together, when Mr. Paul was heard speaking in haste. "Chandler! Tom Chandler Come here directly"—and Tom turned, and went at once.

"Is Hanborough there?" cried Mr. Paul.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him to come in also; no time to lose."

Mr. Paul wanted them to witness his signature to a deed; which had to go off by the evening post. That done, he detained them

for a minute upon some other matter; after which, Hanborough left the room. Chandler turned to follow him.

"Bring the letters in as soon as they come," said Mr. Paul. "There may be one from Burnaby."

"Oh, they have come," replied Tom: and he went into the other room and brought the letters to the lawyer.

It was this which Tom Chandler now related to his master and to Mr. Preen. By dint of exercising his own memory and referring to his day-book, Mr. Paul was enabled to say that the letters that past afternoon were four in number, and to state from whom they came. There was no letter amongst them from Mr. Preen; none at all from Duck Brook. So there it was: the letter seemed to have mysteriously vanished; either out of the post bag despatched by Mrs. Sym, or else after its arrival at Islip. The latter was of course the more probable; since, as Dame Sym had herself remarked, once a letter was shut up in the bag, there it must remain; it could not vanish from it.

But, assuming this to be the case, how and where had it vanished? From the Islip post-office? Or from the postman's hands when carrying it out for delivery? Or from Mr. Paul's front room?

They were yet speaking when Dale the postman, walked in. He came to say that he had been exercising his mind upon the afternoons of the past week and could now distinguish Wednesday from the others. He recalled it by remembering that it was the afternoon of the accident in the street, when a tax-cart was overturned and the driver had broken his arm; and he could positively say that he had that afternoon delivered the letters to Mr. Chandler himself.

"Yes, yes, we remember all that ourselves, Dale," returned Mr. Paul, somewhat testily. "The thing we want you to remember is, whether you observed amidst the letters one with a large red seal."

Dale shook his head. "No, sir, I did not. The letters lay one upon another, address upwards, and I took no particular notice of them. There were four or five of them, I should think."

"Four," corrected the lawyer. "Well, that's all, Dale, for the present. The letter is lost, and we must consider what to do in the matter."

Yes, it was all very well to say that to Dale, but what *could* they do? How set about it? To begin with, Preen did not know the number of the note, but supposed he might get it from Mr. Todhetley. He stayed so long in discussion with the lawyer, that his son, waiting in the gig outside, grew tired and the horse impatient.

Oliver was almost ready to die of weariness, when an acquaintance of his came out of the Bell. Fred Scott; a dashing young fellow, who had more money than brains.

"Get up," said Oliver. And Scott got into the gig.

They were driving slowly about and talking fast, when two young

ladies came into view at the end of the street. Oliver threw the reins to his friend, got out in a trice and met them. No need to say that one of them was Emma Paul.

"I beg your pardon," said Oliver to her, lifting his hat from his suddenly flushed face, as he shook hands with both of them. "I left two books at your house yesterday: did you get them? The servant said you were out."

"Oh, yes, I had them; and I thank you very much," answered Emma, with a charming smile: while Mary MacEveril went away to feast her eyes at the milliner's window. "I have begun one of them already."

"Jane said you would like to read them; and so—I—I left them," returned Oliver, with the hesitating shyness of true love.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Oliver, to bring them over, and I am sorry I was not at home," said Emma. "When are you and Jane coming to see me?"

With her dimpled face all smiles, her blue eyes beaming upon him, her ready handshake still tingling in his pulses, her cordial tones telling of pleasure, how could that fascinated young man do otherwise than believe in her? The world might talk of her love for Tom Chandler: he did not and would not believe it held a grain of truth. Oh, if he could but know that she loved *him!* Mary MacEveril turned.

"Emma, are you not coming? We have that silk to match, you know."

With another handshake, another sweet smile, she went away with Mary. Oliver said adieu, his heart on his lips. All his weariness was gone, lost in a flood of sunshine.

Mr. Preen was seen, coming along. Scott got out of the gig, and Oliver got into it. Preen took his seat and the reins, and drove off.

Mr. Paul went home to dinner at the usual hour that evening, but the clerks remained beyond the time for closing. Work had been hindered, and had to be done. Batley was the first to leave; the other two lingered behind, talking of the loss.

"It is the most surprising thing that has happened for a long while," remarked Hanborough. He had locked his desk and had his hat and gloves at his elbow. "That letter has been stolen, Mr. Chandler; it has not been accidentally lost."

"Ay," assented Tom. "Stolen—I fear—from here. From this very room that you and I are standing in, Hanborough."

"My suspicions, sir, were directed to the Islip post-office."

"I wish mine were," said Tom. "I don't think—think, mind, for we cannot be sure—that the post-office is the right quarter to look to. You see the letters were left here on your desk, while we were occupied with Mr. Paul in his room. About two minutes I suppose, we stayed with him; perhaps, three. Did anyone come in during that time, Hanborough, and take the letter?"

Mr. Hanborough drew off his spectacles, which he wore out of doors as well as in; he was sure to take them off when anything disturbed him.

"But who would do such a thing?" he asked.

Tom laughed a little. "You wouldn't, old friend, and I wouldn't; but there may be people in the neigbourhood who would."

Doubts were presenting themselves to Michael Hanborough's mind: he did not "see" this, as the saying runs. "Why should anyone single out that one particular letter to take, and leave the rest?" he resumed.

"That point puzzles me," remarked Tom. "If the letter was singled out, as you put it, from the rest, I should say the thief must have known it contained money: and who could, or did, know that? I wish I had carried the letters in with me when Mr. Paul called out to me!"

"If the letters had been left alone for a whole day in our office, I should never have supposed they were not safe," said the clerk, impulsively. "But, now that my attention has been drawn to this, I must mention something, Mr. Chandler."

"Yes. Go on."

"When the master called me in after you, I followed you in through that door," he began, pointing to the door of communication between the two rooms. "But I left it by the other, the passage door, chancing to be nearest to it at the moment. As I went out, I saw the green baize door swinging, and supposed that someone had come in; MacEveril, perhaps, from his tea. But he had not done so. I found neither him nor anyone else; the room here was vacant as when I left it."

The green baize door stood in the passage, between the street door, always open in the daytime, and the door that led into the front office.

"Seeing no one here, I concluded I was mistaken; and I never thought of it from that hour to this," continued the clerk. "No, not even when it came out that a letter had been lost with a bank note in it."

Tom nodded his head several times, as much as to say, that was when the thief must have come in. "And now, Hanborough, I'll tell you something in turn," he went on. "Dale put the letters into my hand that afternoon, as you know; and I laid them on your desk here while showing you that clause in the mortgage deed. Later, when I took up the letters to carry them to Mr. Paul, an idea struck me that the packet felt thinner. It did indeed. I, of course, supposed it to be only fancy, and let it slip from my mind. I have never thought of it since—as you say by the green door—until this afternoon."

Michael Hanborough, who had put his spectacles on again, turned them upon his young master, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Who is it that—that we may suspect, sir?"

"Say yourself, Hanborough."

"I'm afraid to say. Is it—MacEveril?"

"It looks like it," replied Tom, in the same low tone. "But while there are reasons for suspecting him, there are also reasons against it," he added, after a pause. "MacEveril was in debt, petty little odds and ends of things which he owes about the place and elsewhere; that's one reason why money would be useful to him. Then his running away looks suspicious; and another reason is that there's positively no one else to suspect. All that seems to tell against him; but on the other hand, MacEveril, though random and heedless, is a gentleman and has a gentleman's instincts, and I do *not* think he would be guilty of such a thing."

"Well, and I can't think it, either," said Michael Hanborough; "despite his faults and his saucy tongue, I liked him. He did not come in again that afternoon till half-past five, I remember. I told him he was late; he answered, laughing, that he had dropped asleep over his tea—though I didn't believe a word of it."

"If MacEveril really took the letter, how had he ascertained that it contained money?" mused Tom Chandler. "Hanborough, at present I think this suspicion of him had better lie entirely between ourselves.'

"Yes, Mr. Chandler, and so do I. Perhaps a few days may bring forth something to confirm or dispel it."

II.

PREEN was a great deal too anxious and restless to let the following day pass over quietly; and on that Sunday afternoon when we were all sitting in the garden at Crabb Cot, under the scent and shade of the large syringa trees, he walked in. His little dark face looked darker than ever, the scowl of pain on his brow deeper.

"No, I can't take anything," he said, in answer to the Squire's hospitable offers of having wine, or ale, or lemonade brought out. "Thirsty? Yes, I am thirsty, Squire, but it is with worry, not with the walk. Wine and lemonade won't relieve that."

And, sitting down to face us, in a swinging American chair, which Tod had brought out for his own benefit, Gervais Preen surprised us with the history of his mysterious loss, and enquired whether the Squire could give him the number of the note.

"Yes, I can," replied the Squire; "my name is on the note also; you made me write it, you know. How on earth has it got lost?"

"It is just one of those things there's no accounting for," said Preen, bending forward in his earnestness. "The letter left Duck Brook in safety; I posted it myself, and Mrs. Sym took notice of it when she shut it up in the bag. That is as far as it can be traced. The Islip post-office, though not remembering it in particular, have

no doubt it reached them, as it could not have been lost from the bag, or that they sent it out for delivery to Mr. Paul by Dale, who is cautious and trustworthy. Paul declares it never reached him; and of course, *he* is trustworthy. Dale says, and it is a fact, that he delivered the letters that afternoon into Mr. Chandler's own hands. One cannot see where to look for a weak point, you perceive, Todhetley."

The Squire was rubbing his face, the account having put it into a white heat. "Bless my heart!" cried he. "It reminds me of that five-pound note of mine which was changed in the post for a stolen one! You remember *that*, Johnny."

"Yes, sir, that I do."

"Wednesday, the sixteenth, was the day it ought to have reached old Paul?" exclaimed Tod, who was balancing himself on the branch of a tree. "Why, that was the day before the pic-nic!"

"And what if it was?" retorted Preen, enraged that everybody should bring up that pic-nic in conjunction with his loss. "The pic-nic had nothing to do with my bank-note and letter."

"Clearly not," agreed Tod, laughing at his ire.

"I should advertise, Preen," said the Squire, "and I should call in the detectives. They ——"

"I don't like detectives," growled Preen, interrupting him, "and I think advertising might do more harm than good. I must get my money back somehow; I can't afford to lose it. But as to those detectives —— Mercy upon us!"

In the ardour of declamation, Mr. Preen had bent a little too forward. The chair backed from under him, and he came down upon the grass, hands and knees. Tod choked with laughter, and dashed off to get rid of it. The man gathered himself up.

"Nasty tilting things, those chairs are!" he exclaimed. "Please don't trouble, ma'am," for Mrs. Todhetley had sprung forward; "there's no harm done. And if you don't mind giving me the number of the note to-day, Squire, I shall be much obliged."

He declined to stay for tea, saying he wanted to get back home. When he and the Squire went indoors, we talked of the loss; Mrs. Todhetley thought it strangely unaccountable.

As the days went on, and the bank-note did not turn up, Mr. Preen fell into the depths of gloom. He had lost no time in proceeding to the Old Bank, at Worcester—from whence Mr. Todhetley had drawn the note, in conjunction with other notes—recounting to its principals the history of its loss, and giving in its number, together with the information that Mr. Todhetley's name was written on it. The bank promised to make inquiries of other banks, and to detain the note should it be paid in.

"As if *that* were likely!" groaned Preen. "A rogue filching a note would not go and pay it into the place it came from."

Thomas Chandler was gazetted the partner of Mr. Paul, the firm to be known henceforth as Paul and Chandler. In the first private

conference that the young man held with his partner, he imparted to him the suspicions which he and Hanborough held of Dick MacEveril. For as that erratic gentleman continued to absent himself, and the time was going on without bringing a shadow of doubt upon anyone else, the new partner felt that in duty he must speak to his chief and elder. Old Paul was overwhelmed.

"What a dreadful thing!" he exclaimed, testily. "And why couldn't you or Hanborough mention this before?"

"Well," said Tom, "for one thing I was always expecting something might crop up to decide it one way or another; and, to tell the truth, sir, I cannot bring myself to believe that MacEveril did it."

"He is a villainous young dog for impudence, but—to do such a thing as that? No, I can hardly think it, either," concluded the lawyer.

That same evening, after his dinner, Mr. Paul betook himself to Oak Mansion, to an interview with his old friend, Captain MacEveril. Not to accuse that scapegrace nephew of the Captain's to his face, but to gather a hint or two about him, if any might be gathered.

The very first mention of Dick's name set the old sailor off. His right foot was showing symptoms of gout just then; between that and Dick he had no temper at all. Calming down presently, he called his man to produce tobacco and grog. They sat at the open window, smoking a pipe apiece, the glasses on a stand between them, and the lame foot upon a stool. For the ex post-captain made a boast that he did not give in to that enemy of his any more than he had ever given in to an enemy at a sea-fight. The welcome evening breeze blew in upon them through the open bow window, with the sweet-scent of the July roses; and the sky was gorgeous with the red sunset.

"Where is Dick, you ask," exploded the Captain. "How should I know where he is? Hang him! When he has taken his fill of London shows with that Australian companion of his, he'll make his way back again here, I reckon. Write? Not he. He knows he'd get a letter back from me, Paul, if he did."

Leading up to it by degrees, talking of this and that, and especially of the mysterious loss of Preen's note, the lawyer spoke doubtingly of whether it could have been lost out of his own office, and, if so, who had taken it. "That young rascal would not do such a thing, you know, MacEveril," he carelessly remarked.

"What, Dick? No, no, he'd not do that," said the Captain, promptly. "Though I've known young fellows venture upon queer things when they were hard up for money. Dick's honest to the backbone. Had he wanted money to travel with, he'd have wormed it out of my wife by teasing, but he'd not steal it."

"About that time, a day or so before it, he drew out the linings of his pockets as he sat at his desk, and laughingly assured Hanborough that he had not a coin of ready money in the world," remarked Mr. Paul.

"Like enough," assented the Captain. "Coin never stays in *his* pockets."

"I wonder where he found the money to travel with?"

"Pledged his watch and chain maybe," returned the Captain with composure. "He would be quite equal to *that.* Stockleigh, the fellow he is with in London, had brought home heaps of gold 'twas said; he no doubt stands treat for Dick."

John Paul did not, could not, say anything more definite. He thought of nothing else as he walked home; now saying to himself that Dick had stolen the money, now veering over to the Captain's opinion that Dick was incapable of doing so. The uncertainty bothered him, and he hated to be bothered.

The man to whom the money was owing, Robert Derrick, was becoming very troublesome. Hardly a day passed but he marched into Mr. Paul's office, to press for payment, threatening to take steps if he did not get it shortly. The morning following the lawyer's visit to Captain MacEveril, he went in again, vowing it was for the last time, for that he should cite Mr. Preen before the County Court.

"And mark you this," he added to Hanborough, with whom the colloquy was taking place, "some past matters will come out that Preen wants kept in. He'll wish he had paid me, then."

Now, old Paul overheard this, for the door was partly open. Rugged in look, and in manner too when he chose to be, he was not rugged at heart. He was saying to himself that if this money had really been lost out of his office, stolen possibly by one of his clerks, he might replace it from his own pocket, to ward off further damage to Preen. Preen had not at present a second ten pound note to give, could not find one anyway; Preen wished he could. Ten pounds would not affect the lawyer's pocket at all: and his resolution was taken. Ringing his bell, which was answered by Batley, he bade him show Derrick to his room.

The man came in with a subdued face. He supposed he had been overheard, and he did not care to offend Mr. Paul.

"I cannot have you coming here to disturb my clerks, Derrick," said the lawyer, with authority. "If you write out a receipt, I will pay you."

"And sure enough that's all I want, sir," returned Derrick, who was Irish. "But I can't let the thing go on longer—and it's Preen I'd like to disturb, Lawyer Paul, not you."

"Sit down yonder and write the receipt," said the lawyer, shortly. "You know how to word it."

So Derrick wrote the receipt and went off with the ten pounds. And Gervais Preen said a few words of real thanks to Mr. Paul in a low tone, when he heard of it.

On Tuesday morning, the thirteenth of July, exactly four weeks to the day since the bank note left Mr. Preen's hands, he had news of it. The Old Bank at Worcester wrote to him to say that the missing

note had been paid-in the previous day, Monday, by a well-known firm of linendrapers in High Street. Upon which the bank made enquiry of this firm as to whence they received the note, and the answer, readily given, was that they had had it from a neighbour opposite—the silversmith. The silversmith, questioned in his turn, replied with equal readiness that it had been given him in payment of a purchase by young Mr. Todhetley.

Preen, hardly believing his eyes, went off with all speed to Islip, and laid the letter before Lawyer Paul.

"What does it all mean?" he asked. "How can young Todhetley have had the note in his possession? I am going on to Crabb Cot to show the Squire the letter."

"Stop, stop," said the far-seeing lawyer, "it won't do to take this letter to Todhetley. Let us consider, first of all, how we stand. There must be some mistake. The bank and the silversmith have muddled matters between them; they may have put young Todhetley's name into it through seeing his father's on the bank note. I will write at once to Worcester and get it privately enquired into. You had better leave it altogether in my hands, Preen, for the present." A proposal Preen was glad to agree to.

Lawyer Paul wrote to another lawyer in Worcester with whom he was on friendly terms, Mr. Corles; stating the particulars of the case. That gentleman lost no time in the matter; he made the enquiries himself, and speedily wrote back to Islip.

There had been no mistake, as Mr. Paul had surmised. The linendrapers, a long-established and respectable firm, as Paul knew, had paid the note into the Old Bank, with other monies, in the ordinary course of business; and the firm repeated to Mr. Corles that they had received it from their neighbour, the silversmith.

The silversmith himself was from home at this time; he was staying at Malvern for his health, going to Worcester on the market days only, Saturdays and Wednesdays, when the shop expected to be busy. He had one shopman only, a Mr. Stephenson, who took charge in his master's absence. Stephenson assured Mr. Corles that he had most positively taken the note from Squire Todhetley's son. Young Mr. Todhetley had gone into the shop, purchased some trifling article, given the note in payment, and received the change in gold. Upon referring to his day-book, Stephenson found that the purchase was made and the note paid to him during the morning of Thursday, the seventeenth of June.

When this communication from Mr. Corles reached Islip, it very much astonished old Paul. "Absurd!" he exclaimed, flinging it upon his table when he had read it; then he took it up and read it again.

"Here, Chandler," said he, calling his new partner to him, "what do you make of this?"

Tom Chandler read it twice over in his turn. "If Joseph Todhetley

did change the note," he observed, "he must have done it as a practical joke, and be keeping up the joke."

"It is hardly likely," returned Mr. Paul. "If he has, he will have a bad quarter of an hour when the Squire hears of it."

On this same morning, Thursday, we were preparing for Worcester; the Squire was going to drive us in—that is, myself and Tod. The phaeton was actually being brought round to the gate and we were getting our hats, when Tom Chandler walked in, saying he had come upon a little matter of business.

"No time to attend to it now, Tom," said the Squire, all in a bustle; "just starting for Worcester. You look hot."

"I am hot, for I came along at a trotting pace," said Tom; "the matter I have come upon makes me hot also. Mr. Todhetley, I must explain it, short as your time may be; it is very important, and—and peculiar. Mr. Paul charged me to say that he would have come himself but he is obliged to stay at home to keep an appointment."

"Sit down then," said the Squire, "and make it as brief as you can. Johnny, lad, tell Giles to drive the horses slowly about."

When I got back, after telling Giles, Tom Chandler had two letters in his hand; and was apologising to the Squire and to Tod for what he was obliged to enter upon. Then he added, in a few words, that the lost bank-note had come to light; it had been changed at Worcester, at the silversmith's in High Street, by, it was asserted, young Mr. Todhetley.

"Why, what d'ye mean?" cried the Squire sharply.

To explain what he meant, Tom Chandler read aloud the two letters he held; the short one, which had been first addressed to Mr. Preen by the Old Bank, and then the longer one written by Mr. Corles.

"Edward Corles must be a fool to write that!" exclaimed the Squire in his hot fashion.

"Well, he is not that, you know," said Tom Chandler. "The question is, Squire, what the grounds can be upon which they so positively state it. According to their assertion, young Mr. Todhetley changed the note at the silversmith's on the morning of Thursday, the Seventeenth of June."

"Young Mr. Todhetley" in a general way was just as hot as his father, apt to fly out for nothing. I expected to see him do so now. Instead of which, he had a broad smile on his face, evidently regarding the accusation as a jest. He had perched himself on the arm of the sofa, and sat there grinning.

This struck Tom Chandler. "Did you do it for a joke?" he asked promptly.

"Do what?" rejoined Tod.

"Change the note."

"Not I."

"The only conclusion Mr. Paul and I could come to was, that—if you had done it—you did it to play a practical joke upon Preen, and were keeping it up still."

The Squire struck his hand in anger upon the table by which he sat.

"What is the meaning of this, Joe? A practical joke? Did you do the thing, or didn't you? Speak out seriously. Don't sit there, grinning like a Chinese image."

"Why, of course I did not do it, father. How should Preen's bank-note get into my hands? Perhaps Johnny there got it and did it. He is sometimes honoured by being put down as your son, you know."

He was jesting still. The Squire was not in a mood for jesting; Tom Chandler either. A thought struck me.

"Did you say the note was changed on Thursday, the Seventeenth of June?" I asked him.

"They say so," answered Tom Chandler.

"Then that was the day of the picnic at Mrs. Cramp's. Neither I nor Tod left the house at all until we went there."

"Why bless me, so it was! the seventeenth," cried the Squire. "I can prove that they were at home till four o'clock: the Beeles were spending the day here from Pigeon Green. Now, Chandler, how has this false report arisen?"

"I am as much at sea as you can be, sir," said Tom Chandler. "Neither I nor Paul can, or do, believe it—or understand why the other people stick to it so positively. You are going into Worcester, Squire; make your own enquiries."

"That I will," said the Squire. "You had better drive in with us, Chandler, if you can. Giles can stay at home."

It was thus decided, and we started for Worcester, Chandler sitting beside the Squire. And the way the Squire touched up Bob and Blister, and the pace we flew along at, was a sight for the road to see.

III.

THURSDAY morning, the Seventeenth of June—for we have to go back to that day. High Street was basking in the rays of the hot sun; foot passengers, meeting each other on the scorching pavement, lifted their hats for a moment's air, and said what a day it was going to be. The clean, bright shops faced each other from opposite sides. None of their wares looked more attractive than those displayed in the two windows of the silversmith.

Mr. Stephenson—a trustworthy, civil little man of thirty, who had a plain face and sandy hair that stood upright on his head—was keeping guard over his master's goods, some of them being very valuable. The shop was a long one and he was far down in it,

behind the left-hand counter. Before him lay a tray of small articles of jewellery, some of which he was touching up with a piece of wash-leather. He did not expect to be busy that day; the previous day, Wednesday, had been a busy one, so many country people came into town for the market.

While thus engaged, a gentleman, young, good looking, and well dressed, entered the shop. Mr. Stephenson went forward.

"I have called for Mrs. Todhetley's brooch," said the stranger. "Is it ready?"

"What brooch, sir?" returned Stephenson.

"The one she left with you to be mended."

The shopman felt a little puzzled. He said he did not remember that any brooch had been left by that lady to be mended.

"Mrs. Todhetley of Crabb Cot," explained the applicant, perhaps thinking the man was at fault that way.

"Oh, yes, sir, I know who you mean; I know Mrs. Todhetley. But she has not left any brooch here."

"Yes she has; she left it to be mended. I was to call to-day and ask for it."

Stephenson turned to reach the book in which articles left to be mended were entered, with their owners' names. Perhaps his master might have taken in the brooch and omitted to tell him. But no such entry was recorded in it.

"I'm afraid it is a mistake, sir," he said. "Had Mrs. Todhetley left a brooch, or anything else, for repair, it would be entered here. She may have taken it to some other shop."

"No, no; it is yours I was to call at. She bought it here a few months ago," added the young man. "She came in to ask you about the polishing-up of an old silver cake-basket, and you showed her the brooches, some you had just had down from London, and she bought one of them and gave four guineas for it."

Stevenson remembered the transaction perfectly. He had stood by while his principal showed, and sold, the brooch to Mrs. Todhetley. Four only of these brooches had been sent to them on approval by their London agent, they were something quite new. Mrs. Todhetley admired them greatly; said she wanted to make a wedding present to a young lady about to be married, but had not meant to give as much as four guineas. However, the beauty of the brooch tempted her; she bought it, and took it home.

Stephenson's silence, while he was recalling this to his memory, caused the gentleman to think his word was doubted, and he entered into further particulars.

"It was last March, I think," he said. "The brooch is a rather large one; a white cornelian stone, or something of that sort, with a raised spray of flowers upon it, pink and gold; the whole surrounded by a border of gold filagree work. I never saw a nicer brooch."

"Yes, yes, sir, it was just as you say; I recollect it all quite well. Mrs. Todhetley bought it to give away as a wedding present."

"And the wedding never came off," said the young man, with ease. "Before she had time to despatch the brooch, news came to her of the rupture. So she had to keep it herself: and the best thing too, the Squire said. Well, it is that brooch I have come for."

"But I assure you it has not been left with us, Mr. Todhetley," said Stephenson, presuming he was speaking to the Squire's son.

"The little pink flower got broken off last week as Mrs. Todhetley was undoing her shawl; she brought it in at once to be mended," persisted the young man.

"But not here indeed, sir," reiterated Stephenson. "I'm sorry to hear it is broken."

"She wouldn't take it anywhere but to the place it was bought at, would she? I'm sure it was here I had to come for it."

Stephenson felt all abroad. He did not think it likely the brooch would be taken elsewhere. He began to think that his master must have taken it in, and forgotten all about it. Opening a shallow drawer or two in the counter, in one of which articles for repair were put, in the other the repaired articles when finished, he searched both, but could not see the brooch. This took him some little time, as most of the things were in paper and he had to undo it.

Meanwhile the applicant amused himself by looking at the articles displayed under the glass frame on the counter. He seemed to be rather struck with some very pretty pencils.

"Are those pencils gold?" he enquired of Stephenson, when the latter came forward with the ill news that the brooch was certainly not in the shop.

"No, sir; they are silver gilt."

Lifting the glass lid, Stephenson took out the tray on which the pencils and other things lay, and put it right under the young man's nose, in the persuasive manner peculiar to shopmen. The pencils were chased richly enough for gold, and had, each, a handsome stone at the end, amethyst, pink or yellow topaz, or so on, which might or might not be real. They looked very nice, and very handsome.

"What is the price?"

"Twelve shillings each, sir. We bought them a bargain; from a bankrupt's stock in fact; and can afford to sell them as such."

"I should like to take this one I think," said the young man, choosing out the one which had a pink topaz. "Wait a bit, though: I must see if I've enough change to pay for it."

"Oh, sir, don't trouble about that; we will put it down to you."

"No, no, that won't do. One, two, four, six. Six shillings; all I have in the world," he added laughing, as he counted the coin in his porte-monnaie, "and that I want. You can change me a ten-pound note, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir, if you wish it."

The purchaser extracted the note from a secret-pocket of his porte-monnaie, and handed it to the shopman.

"The Squire's name is on it," he remarked.

Which caused Stephenson to look at the back. Sure enough, there it was—"J. Todhetley," in the Squire's own handwriting.

"Give me gold, if you can."

Stephenson handed over nine pounds in gold and eight shillings in silver. He then wrapped the pencil in soft white paper, and handed over that.

Wishing the civil shopman good morning, the young man left. He stood outside the door for a minute, looking about him, and then walked briskly up the street. While Stephenson locked up the ten-pound note in the cash-box.

There it lay, snug and safe, for two or three weeks. One day Stephenson, finding he had not enough change for a customer, who came in to pay a bill, ran over to the draper's opposite, and got change for it there. These were the particulars which Stephenson had furnished, and furnished readily, upon enquiries being made of him.

Squire Todhetley drove like the wind, and we soon reached Worcester, alighting as usual at the Star-and-Garter. The Squire's commotion had been growing all the way; that goes without telling. He wanted to take the bank first; Tom Chandler recommended that it should be the Silversmith's.

"The bank comes first in the way," snapped the Squire.

"I know that, sir; but we can soon come back to it when we have heard what the others say."

Yet I think he would have gone into the bank head-foremost, as we passed it, but chance had it that we met Corles, the lawyer, at the top of Broad Street. Turning quickly into High Street, on his way from his office, he came right upon us. The Squire pinned him by the button-hole.

"The very man I wanted to see," cried he. "And now you'll be good enough to tell me, Edward Corles, what you meant by that rigmarole you wrote to Paul yesterday about my son."

"I cannot tell what was meant, Squire, any more than you can; I only wrote in accordance with my information," said Mr. Corles, shaking hands with the rest of us. "You have done well to come over; and I will accompany you now, if you like, to see Stephenson."

The Squire put his arm within the younger man's, and marched on down High Street to the Silversmith's, never so much as looking at the bank door. Stephenson was in the shop alone: such a lot of us, it seemed, turning in!

The Squire, hot and impulsive, attacked him as he had attacked Edward Corles. What did Stephenson mean by making that infamous accusation about his son?

It took Stephenson aback, as might be seen; his eyes opened and

his hair stood on end straighter than ever. Looking from one to the other of us, he last looked at Mr. Corles, as if seeking an explanation.

"The best thing you can do, to begin with, Stephenson, is to relate to Squire Todhetley and these gentlemen the particulars you gave me yesterday morning," said Mr. Corles. "I mean when you took the bank-note, a month ago."

Without more ado, Stephenson quietly followed the advice; he seemed of as calm a temperament as the Squire was the contrary, and recited the particulars given a little way back. The Squire's will was good to interrupt at every second word, but Mr. Corles begged him to listen to the end.

"Oh, that's all very well," cried he at last, "all true, I daresay; what I want to know is, how you came to pitch upon that customer as being my son."

"But he was your son, sir. He was young Mr. Todhetley."

"Nonsense!" retorted the Squire. "Was this he?" drawing Tod forward.

"No, sir; certainly not."

"Well this is my only son; except a little one who is not yet much more than out of his petticoats. Come! what do you say now?"

Stephenson looked again at one and the other of us. His pale face took a sort of thoughtful haze as if he had passed into a fog.

"It must have been young Mr. Todhetley," spoke he; "everything seemed to uphold the fact."

"Now don't you turn obstinate and uphold what is *not* the fact," reproved the Squire. "When I tell you this is my only son, except the child, how dare you dispute my word?"

It should be stated that Stephenson had been with the Silversmith since the beginning of the year only, and had come from Birmingham. He knew Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley by sight, from their coming sometimes to the shop, but he had never yet seen Tod or me.

"I don't suppose you want Squire Todhetley's word confirmed, Stephenson, but I can do so if necessary," said Mr. Corles. "This is his only grown-up son."

"No, no, sir, of course I don't," said Stephenson. "This gentleman," looking at Tod, "does not bear any resemblance to the one who changed the note."

"What was he like?" said Tom Chandler, speaking for the first time; and he asked it because his thoughts were full.

"He was fair, sir," replied Stephenson.

"What height?"

"About the middle height. A young, slender man."

"Well dressed? Spoke like a gentleman?"

"Oh, quite like a gentleman, and very well dressed indeed."

"Just as MacEveril was that morning, on the strength of getting to the pic-nic," ran through Tom Chandler's thoughts. "Did he come off here first, I wonder?"

"He seemed to know all about you, sir, just as though he lived at your house," said Stephenson to the Squire; "and Mrs. Todhetley sent him for her brooch that day. Perhaps you may know, sir, who it was she sent?"

"Sent! why, nobody," spluttered the Squire. "It must have been a planned thing. The brooch is not broken."

"He said the little pink flower had got broken off, and that Mrs. Todhetley did it with her shawl," persisted Stephenson, unable to stare away his perplexity. And I think we were all feeling perplexed too.

"He knew what the brooch cost, and that it was bought for a wedding present and that Mrs. Todhetley kept the brooch for herself because the wedding did not come off," went on Stephenson. "How could I suppose, sir, it was anybody but your own son? Why once I called him 'Mr. Todhetley;' I remember it quite well; and he did not tell me I was mistaken. Rely upon it, if you'll excuse me for saying so, Squire Todhetley, that it is some young gentleman who is intimate at your house and familiar with all its ways."

"Hang him for a young rogue!" retorted the Squire.

"And your own name was on the note, sir, which he bade me notice, and all; and—and I don't see how it was possible to *help* falling into the mistake that he came from you," concluded Stephenson, with a slightly injured accent.

Upon which the Squire, having had time to take in the bearings of the matter, veered round altogether to the same opinion, and said so, and shook hands with Stephenson when we departed.

Tom Chandler let us go on, remaining behind for a minute or two. He wanted to put quietly a few questions about the appearance of the young man who had changed the note. He also examined the silver-gilt pencils, finally buying one which was precisely similar, stone and all, to the one which had been sold that other morning.

Stephenson answered the questions to the best of his ability and recollection. And Tom Chandler found that while on some points the description would have served very well for that of Richard MacEveril, on other points it did not seem to fit in with it at all.

The conclusion will come next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

Trollhatta.

ONE of the things certainly to be done in Sweden, most certainly to be enjoyed, is the Gotha Canal: upwards from Gothenburg, or downwards from Stockholm. The former route is the better, for then all the beauties of Lake Malaren come in as a "grand climacteric;" a vivid final impression; whilst awaiting you are the attractions of the gay capital itself.

In the downward route, on the contrary, the scenery and interest of the canal cease before reaching Gothenburg; all enjoyment has subsided into a quiet river contemplation with flat, somewhat tame shores. You feel, if it may be so expressed, that your pleasure and your spirits are *unwinding*. It is like the last chapter of a sensational novel. All the mystery that kept you breathless and excited, is being rapidly cleared in a natural and quite commonplace manner; and you wonder with personal vexation why you never thought of this, that, and the other before: never guessed that the first husband was dead, and the beautiful charmer was a guiltless innocent: never imagined that the wardrobe had a false back to it, opening on to a secret staircase leading to a well, into which all the murdered bodies were thrown by that terrible female assassinator.

And then, in the downward route, instead of the liveliness of the capital, you have only the dull Gothenburg in prospect, without a

single attraction or excitement to relieve the monotony of existence; whence your only escape must be an uncertain journey down the Cattegat to Copenhagen; or a still prosier passage—"unromantic as Monday morning"—across the North Sea, back to the shores of old England: a passage which means, by interpretation, a return to every-day life and labour; getting once more into harness; a present farewell to the chances and changes, the adventures and delights of foreign travel and far-off scenes.

The Gotha Canal is a very great work in the way of engineering, by means of which the Baltic is brought into direct communication with the North Sea. Three hundred and fifty years ago it was first thought of; but great schemes like great minds ripen slowly, and nothing important was achieved until the beginning of the 18th century. Again, early in the present century it was further planned and developed by Baron von Platzen, aided and abetted by Thomas Telford, an English engineer. In spite of much opposition from the people of Sweden, the canal became an accomplished fact, and was opened about the year 1832; all improvements and additions thereto ending in 1844.

The journey from Gothenburg to Stockholm occupies about two days and a half. The distance is three hundred and fifty miles, of which about fifty miles is actually canal, and the rest is made up of lakes and river. There are seventy-four locks to be passed; the canal is crossed by more than thirty bridges, and has a fall of ten feet; it is forty-six feet wide at the base, eighty at the surface; and at its highest point it is three hundred feet above the level of the sea. Thus, starting at sea-level from Gothenburg, your steamer has climbed a huge staircase of locks to a height of three hundred feet; after which, it descends again by the same process to the original level, before reaching Stockholm.

Some of these locks appear like staircases built for a giant race, for in certain parts many of them are together; in one place, before reaching Trollhätta, no fewer than eleven. If you choose to land on the banks and watch, you may see the vessel climbing up the monster steps, calmly and deliberately, step by step; taking a long breathing interval between each step while the lock behind is closed, and the one in front is being gradually opened and the water let in. So that between each lock you see the vessel rising ten feet in the world, as evenly and beautiful as if lifted by invisible hands. Eleven such steps may be counted here, eleven long pauses; but there are no mistakes, no false alarms; there is no going backward; no stumbling or tripping to bring good luck to those who may be coming up behind.

We left Gothenburg on Monday morning and were fortunate in having one of the two new steamers lately added to the line: the Ceres. A good many English were on board; the one solitary and only time that we came into contact with them while going about Sweden.

For the English do not visit Sweden with the same determination that they invade other countries. It seems to be very little patronised by tourists. A few enterprising and inquisitive people go through it for no better reason than because they like to see everything; and because, being, as the sailor who made love to the maid, in the old song would have said, "contagious" to Norway, they must realise for themselves that it has not all the beauty and all the charms of the land of the midnight sun: charms that creep into your heart and there fasten themselves with a grasp which never loosens. One visit to Sweden will satisfy any doubt or curiosity upon this point, and, for the most part, will leave your love for the beautiful still hungering and athirst.

The English, as a rule, confine themselves to Stockholm. They make a dash from the capital of Norway to that of Sweden. Generally speaking it is a "moonlight flitting," for more often than not they take the night train.

Having explored Stockholm, its lakes and islands; having wandered through the beautiful rooms and avenues of Drottningholm, and attended the king's public reception in the winter palace; having gazed upon the world from the roof of the Grand Hotel, and lunched at Hasselbacken in the Djurgärd, they straightway take steamer and proceed to immolate themselves on the Steppes of Russia; or dash back to Christiania, as if there, and there alone, was happiness to be found. Or thirdly, and very oppositely, they take the night train to Malmö, cross over to Copenhagen (the Danes will be found nicer, more refined and better looking than the Swedes) and so cunningly work their way southward into civilised Europe, cheating the North sea of its just dues and anticipated tributes.

Yet there were days and excursions in Sweden, or near it, that I would not have been without; even as now I would not be without their recollection. The journey up the Gotha Canal was one of them.

The Ceres left Gothenburg at midday, a goodly company on board of various nations and people and tongues. It was a curious assemblage, composed of many elements. One lady was taking charge of an unwieldy old gentleman—a strangely contrasted pair; the one as conspicuously stout as the other was painfully thin: she, with a pinched, nervous face, whose original bloom had become concentrated in one prominent feature. Her blue eyes were watery and restless, but harmless; and when she spoke her teeth had a trick of going up and down like the keys of a piano, appearing and disappearing in an original and somewhat alarming manner. She had "no Swedish," as the natives would say; and once or twice on appealing to me across the dinner table for help in a difficulty, only plunged herself into greater straits, for I had "no Swedish" either.

Whenever she wanted anything not on the table she made signs to the stewardess, put her head on one side like a sparrow and gave a look intended to be winsome. Such a look as Charity Pecksniff might have worn when it suited her purpose. Having stormed the citadel of the waitress's heart, a pantomime ensued; dumb motions, expressive gestures. But the stewardess refused to be charmed. She understood everything perfectly well, but was of a revengeful or contrary disposition. When asked for salt, she deliberately brought sugar; when the lady made winsome signs for bread,

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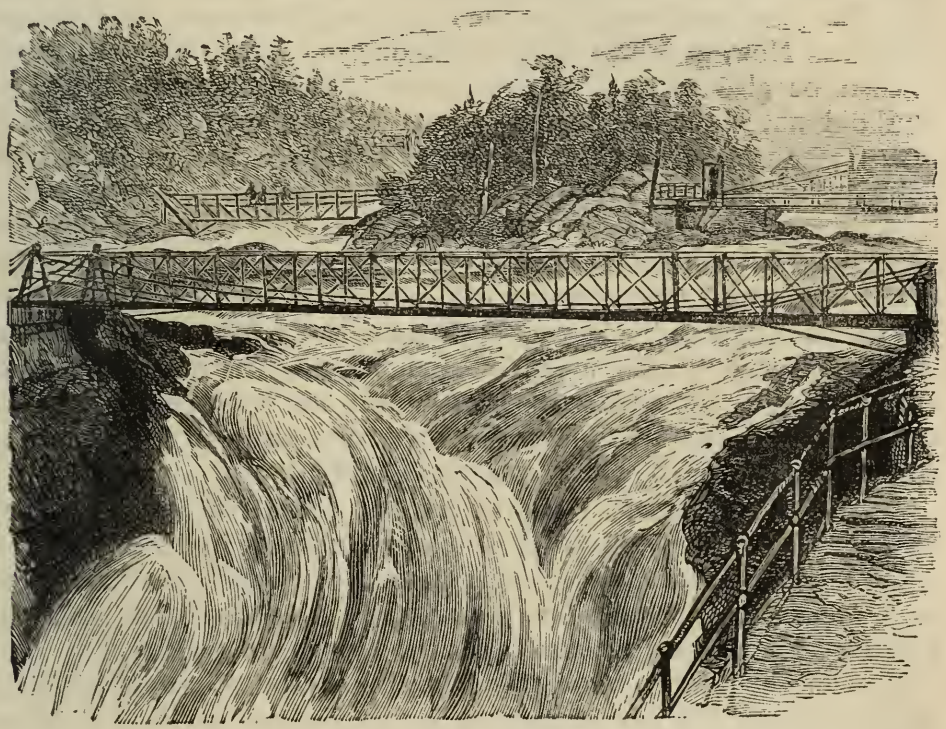
she handed her mustard. Once when she held out her cup for more sugar, she maliciously dropped into it a lump of butter.

The old gentleman in charge had the head of a Gorgon with the body of a Jumbo. He was a nonentity in all intelligent matters, who devoured the piles his fair keeper heaped upon his plate, abused her publicly if he thought she failed him in quantity, and very much enjoyed the port wine he regularly ordered but never shared with her.

Next to him sat quite a different order of being. A fair lady, with golden hair and dazzling complexion, and eyes that did a great deal of execution. She disappeared mysteriously one night, and we had made up our minds that she was not human at all, but a delicious mermaid who had cruelly gone back to her native element, leaving us to lament her loss: when she suddenly turned up again at

Stockholm, in the restaurant of the Grand Hotel, taking luncheon with an earnestness which proved her, without further doubt or controversy, a child of earth. E. had been much the more smitten of the two, and not holding to Lord Byron's opinion, was ready, for the rapture at the golden-haired one's reappearance, to condone a too evident devotion to the pleasures of the table.

There was an elderly man on board, who talked without stops, must have been a prig in his young days and was insufferable in his old. For ever laying down the law, he addressed everyone dictatorially, consequentially; what he said was final, certain as an



TROLLHÄTTA.

oracle, indisputable as the Persian laws. He possessed largely the spirit of contradiction and delighted to put himself in opposition to his neighbours.

One morning a keen east wind was blowing; the sun had gone in; for the time being the upper deck was cold as the Arctic regions.

"Lovely weather!" he remarked.

Dead silence. Evidently no one agreed.

"Ah!" he said. "Too cold for you, I suppose. Now I don't call this cold at all; it is simply bracing." His face was blue, his teeth were chattering, his coat collar was up and his shoulders were in his ears. "I suppose you'd rather have a west wind and sunshine. Now I wouldn't. Give me an east wind and a grey sky; not that everlasting glare which dazzles you, or a hot sun that grills you and gives you prickly heat and a splitting headache. No, no; none of

your azure skies and west winds for me; a grey sky and an east wind and I'm all right. Ah! this is something like!" as a cutting blast made his old teeth chatter, his face bluer than ever.

What could be answered to such a spirit of contradiction? Happily no answer was necessary. He would rush on to the next subject without giving you time to put in a word. He went down, and presently came up again.

"I am given to understand, sir," with a patronising tone and a put-you-down sort of air, which seemed to say: "And what business *had* you there, or *anyone* there but me?"—"I am given to understand, sir, that you have been up to the moon and down into the depths of the earth. Now, as I have been to the one and intend to go the other, I shall be glad to hear your experience of the whole matter. Ah! you did not enjoy the moon—now I did. Climate too variable—now I thought it very even; too much above the world and too solitary?—There, sir, I flatly disagree with you."

This is the conversation as it occurred, only that the disputed point was not the moon, but a quiet place in Italy. Finally the quarrelsome and contradictory old gentleman had to be discarded all round and sent to Coventry. But he had a foil with him in the shape of a companion—masculine gender, singular number: a companion as pleasant and retiring as he was the opposite; with whom one compared notes and conversed pleasantly by the hour, and who added both to the enjoyment and profit of the journey.

We left Gothenburg, then, at midday. Shall we ever get away from it?—the sentence haunts one like the slippers in eastern fable.

On mounting to the upper deck, we felt that enjoyment was before us. At least, there would be no more sea; it would be a calm voyage and, we hoped, a prosperous.

But for the present we were in the river. Gothenburg diminished in the distance, but was a long time before it disappeared. On either side were flat, green reaches, of which we had an extensive view from the height of the upper deck. The weather was warm and sunny—for the easterly blast, above alluded to, had not set in—and if there was nothing startlingly beautiful in the aspect of the country, the fields, at least, were fresh, green, and pleasant to look upon. Every now and then we had to slacken speed, sometimes to stop altogether, as we met a barge that either could not or would not get out of the way in time. Some of these barges had brown sails set, some were propelled with large and clumsy oars, but all were picturesque and lively objects, breaking the monotony of the river way. Most of them were laden with wood, and hailed the steamer as she went by, claiming good fellowship with everyone on board. Rafts, too, we occasionally met, generally in charge of a man and a woman—no doubt life partners for better for worse—each labouring at an oar; as we passed, even at slowest speed, the water plashed and washed over the wood, and those on the raft would give a series of little jumps, very funny and

comical, in their endeavours to escape the waves and keep dry feet, until the miniature tempest had subsided. For a time we were continually passing these barges, continually slackening speed. The reeds and rushes by the river side bowed down and disappeared at our approach as if making salutations, drawn in by the action of the steamer upon the water.

Presently we passed the castle of Bohus, once the largest castle in Sweden, as now the greatest ruin. It lies upon an island dividing the estuary of the Gotha into two channels—one running to Gothenburg, the other out to sea. Opposite was the small town of Kongelf, which looked inviting from the banks of the river, but which I think we passed without stopping. The scenery about here was characterised by a certain wildness. Rocky hills looked bare and barren; the water widened. Being the most interesting spot we had yet reached, of course the bell rang and everyone went down to dinner. Dinner, somehow, always is announced at the wrong moment, when the best part of the scenery is going on. And to descend when the bell rang was a matter of necessity; otherwise you lost your place, and those who trusted to a second and later detachment sometimes had to dine with Duke Humphrey.

The dinner was a long process, for a very small return. The stewardesses were not up to their work—or rather they had more to do than they could manage, and kept you waiting so long between each course that the previous course had time to be comfortably digested. Then there was the smörgasbord to begin with, at which both English and Swedish assisted — a goodly company, for the Swedes on board were in the majority. The few who passed over the smörgasbord as superfluous, exercised their patience on camp stools, guarding their places: for the Swedes had no idea of not taking any vacant seat at table, whether reserved or not. Possession with them was nine points of the law: "qui va à la ducasse, perd sa place," their motto. Dinner consisted of three courses, and it took considerably over an hour to get through them.

After Kongelf we continued our way up the river, the banks enlivened by country houses, factories, and other signs of life and industry. Then presently we came to the first part of the canal and first locks. By five o'clock we had reached Trollhätta, and the most celebrated falls in Sweden.

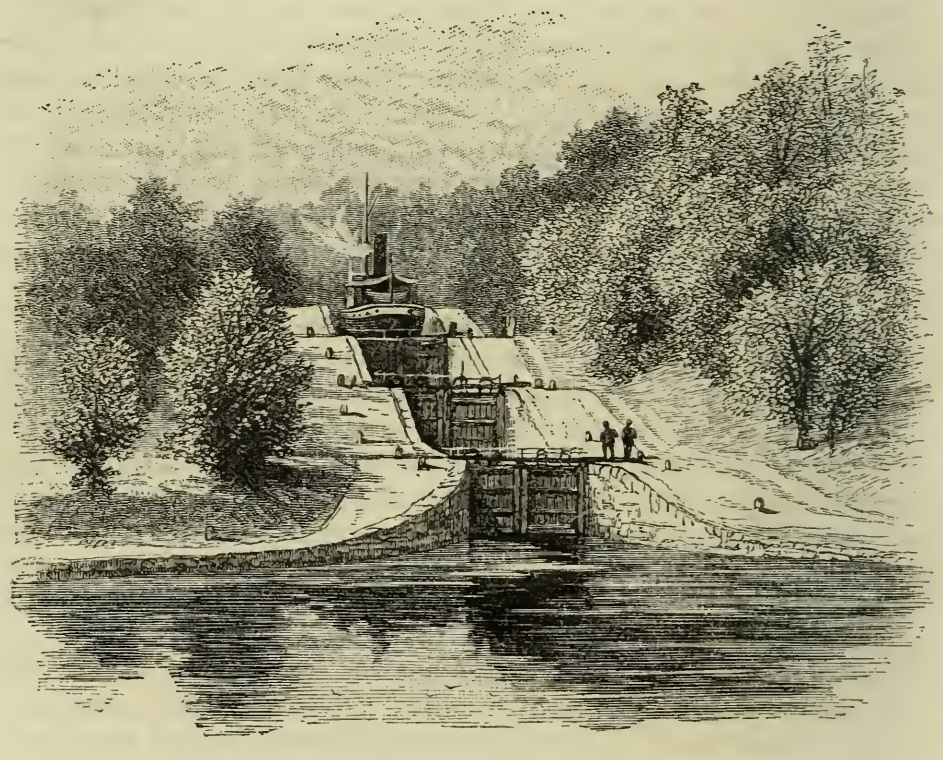
Everyone who wished to see the falls—and who did not?—had now to leave the vessel. Whilst they went round one way, on their visit of inspection, she would proceed, step by step, through the eleven locks. The hotel was to be our rallying point.

It was a pleasant break in the journey. And, indeed, throughout the trip, we were frequently able to leave the steamer and walk along the banks, exploring the country, enjoying the shade thrown by the trees, the cool greensward beneath our feet.

So everyone left the ship for Trollhätta falls, breaking themselves

up into parties and detachments, according to numbers and inclinations.

It was a wild and beautiful walk, through a deep valley, under craggy and romantic rocks, covered with lichen and moss and ferns, from which trees overhung far up, with long arms that seemed to be pronouncing a benediction upon the world. Great boulders of rock lay about our path, immense fragments that must have rolled down and lain there for ages past. Our path was rugged, wound and twisted about; now hilly and ascending, now leading downward over and around these rocky masses. Now in the gloom and depths



GOING THROUGH THE LOCKS.

of smaller groves, with flowers and ferns about our path, and the small wild strawberry; and now a longer avenue, a stiff ascent, and groves of trees that led us within sound of the rushing water. Turning to the left, and walking to the edge of the chasm, a view of the splendid falls at once burst upon us.

An immense mass of rushing, swirling, seething foam, twisted into many shapes and designs by great boulders of rock, by miniature islands rising from its very centre. The falls are not high and perpendicular, like most of the celebrated falls of the world; but of tremendous extent, of amazing, breathless rapidity, whilst the body of water is probably the largest of any fall in Europe. Their situation, too, is very romantic. It was the wildest spot we had seen in Sweden. In all directions great rocks stood out of the water, narrow-

ing its course and increasing its rush and roar, causing it to twist and divide and assume all sorts of fantastic shapes and forms. Cliffs towered above to a great height, barren, broken and rugged; here showing a surface of cold grey stone, there lichen and moss covered, with the hue of centuries upon it: now fringed with fir trees, often to the very edge of the water.

Looking upwards from below the falls, you see factories and ironworks and tall chimneys perched by the side, washed—almost surrounded—by the rushing water. But these somehow do not take from its effect. Rather they increase it, by adding life to the scene, whilst their black

On the Banks of the Gotha Canal.

walls give it tone and effect; standing out in singular contrast with the white foam. The falls are six in number, their total height is over 188 feet, whilst from first to last their length is about 160 yards.

E. and I soon found ourselves alone, and climbing the heights, looked down upon this valley of waters. It was magnificent beyond description, its power upon the mind exceeding that of all the waterfalls we had ever seen.

We had visited the chief waterfalls of Norway; some are beautiful, and some are grand and imposing; but none of them excited the breathless sensation that comes over you while gazing upon the Falls of Trollhätta. It was perpetual motion, inexhaustible supply. A few have had the temerity to attempt to ford them, but none ever survived to tell the tale of their folly. Yet at the hotel they showed us a dog that

once tumbled in from the very top, had been hurried through the rapids and torrents down to the end, and had come out stupid and breathless, but otherwise uninjured. A large, black, fat, superannuated retriever, ending his days in the lazy, pampered happiness and indulgence of unconscious heroism.

From our present height, far above the falls, we gazed upon yet greater heights above us and before us. On the very summit of what looked like an extensive plateau, a large white church was strangely conspicuous against a background of clear blue sky. To the right, falls and valley descended and disappeared in precipitous depths. One felt that this ought to be altogether a place of abode for many days. A passing gaze at these falls was insufficient. Their grandeur and extent could only be realised and enjoyed after a certain familiarity and acquaintance.

We stayed on, doing our best to absorb all this greatness and grandeur, until we thought our leave of absence must be up. The falls were magnificent, but we had no wish to lose the boat. For long we seemed to have been the last of the "band of pilgrims"—whether happy or not, each could only answer unto himself. We do not wear our hearts upon our sleeves. So we hastened down, piloted by a small guide, who, whether we would or no, had appropriated us as his own special perquisite, and in whose assurances that we had plenty of time we put no faith.

Yet he was right, and proved himself "trustie to the end." Once more on a level with the rushing water, surveying the torrent from the very edge of great boulders, it threw around its spray in rather too affectionate and boisterous a manner. We crossed the bridge, went round by the forge, and lost sight of the falls with a sigh. Like Oliver Twist, we longed for more. When we came in view of the hotel, there was neither sound nor symptom of the Ceres.

It was a goodly sized inn. The big, black dog-hero of Trollhätta, lying in front of the door, greeted us with a lazy wag of the tail and a blink of his sleepy eyes. As the little guide had said, we had plenty of time before us. Those eleven locks were not to be passed in a hurry. There was no fear of being left behind. Where the pilgrims had disappeared to was a mystery. Not one of them was visible, except the lady with the golden hair, attended by two devoted cavaliers who each looked as if he could cheerfully dispense with the other's company. Golden-hair was dramatically disclaiming in the hotel garden, evidently recounting the effect of the falls upon her imagination. We left them to it, went in and found a large room upstairs, with a sweet-toned piano and other evidences of civilisation. Here they brought us coffee—and there is hardly any coffee in the world like Swedish coffee. It is always good; generally superlative. We lounged at the open window, slowly consumed our nectar, and watched the even tenour of village life. Our little guide was surrounded by a small army of boys. He was just now in clover;

the world had prospered with him ; his companions were full of friendship and affection. The pilgrims were coming up in detachments.

Presently a whistle ; an outside commotion ; the eleven locks were behind the Ceres ; our moments in Trollhätta were numbered. Down we went. The old dog condescended to get up and lazily watch us off the premises. He was almost too fat to walk. Notoriety had spoilt him. It is easier to win laurels than to wear them. A tumble into the falls now would have been fatal, ending in tragedy.

The boat came alongside. The pilgrims went on board, headed by Golden-Hair and her devoted slaves. If they did not spread their mantles for her to walk upon, it was that mantles were missing, not that they did not think her adorable and queenly. Other pilgrims followed up the gangway with becoming dignity, and others again scrambled over the sides, their motto "Sans cérémonie." All were there. For once there was no waiting for stragglers: romantic couples who take account of nothing but their own hearts' emotions. In good time the Ceres went on her way rejoicing. Went her way on the calm waters of the canal, green banks on either side, bordered by bowing reeds and rushes. Roadways were beyond, small houses or farms, cherry orchards absolutely groaning with fruit. It was so tantalising that everyone declared, like the fox and the grapes, that the fruit was not ripe. But if redness was any sign of maturity, all that make-believe was a mere sham and a pretence. "O ruddier than the cherry" was never written in a Swedish orchard.

Wherever we stopped—and we stopped frequently—the country people came down with supplies of cherries, strawberries and raspberries. But cherries were most plentiful and most popular. Large market baskets brimful of rich, luscious fruit. Almost everyone on board, but especially the Swedish ladies, invested in unlimited quantities, handed up in conical paper bags running over with good measure: inverted pyramids more popular and accessible than those of Egypt. When the bags failed, handkerchiefs came to the rescue. Then these refined Swedish ladies—everyone talks so much of the refinement of the Swedes as compared with the Norwegians—would proceed to dispose of their purchases. As for the stones, if they shot into the water, so much the better ; if they fell upon the deck, and became so many traps for spinal-concussion and fractured skulls, it was, as Mr. Toots would have said, of no consequence. Long before the end of the journey we had had quite enough of the Swedish ladies: and, for the matter of that, of the Swedish men also.

But these specimens met in travel must not be taken as an example of the best type of Swedes, any more than the higher English type is seen in the specimens ordinarily found journeying at home or abroad. The exceptional Swedes, when we met them—it was seldom—were charming and delightful. It must be so. Go where you will, the nice people in the world are in the minority.

After leaving Trollhätta and devoting an hour to the melancholy pleasures of the supper table, twilight fell upon the earth, and then darkness. A darkness which toned and subdued everything, yet in which near objects were quite visible. The distant landscape was clothed with a black pall; but lights gleamed in roadside cottages, and here and there an open doorway disclosed the bright embers of a peat fire smouldering upon a hearth; disclosed sometimes the outlines of a Darby and Joan quietly watching these embers, and suggesting all sorts of possible domestic dramas, in the most simple of which so often lie hidden all the elements of a tragedy. The trees fringing the highway cast long shadows upon our watery path, grim and spectral, while they rustled mysteriously in the night wind. The stars, bright and splendid, found their reflections multiplied and broken up into gleams and flashes by the troubled waters of our wake.

Everyone had long gone down, and E. and I had the deck to ourselves. Even the dictatorial old gentleman had turned in, after declaring that this was just the sort of country he liked: that for his part he didn't believe Norway was a bit better than Sweden: and that, àpropos of the stupid stars up there with their blinking eyes, he didn't believe a word of the old fable about Galileo; had always doubted the old man's existence. "Nothing lies like history and tradition," said he; "and if you applied the rules of contrary to everything you read and heard, the chances were you might sometimes come upon a little truth."

About ten o'clock we touched at Venersborg, a small, flourishing town, looking substantial and well built, with a wide business-like quay. As the steamers run quite as much for commercial purposes as for pleasure, here cargo was both unloaded and taken on board, a few passengers left and others took their place. Lighted up, as it was to-night, the place looked bright and cheerful in all the surrounding darkness.

And singular and weird was the feeling and impression when, on leaving Venersborg, we plunged almost at once into the black, wide waste of the waters of Lake Wenern. Strange the effect of being surrounded by land and houses one moment, and plunging the next into an inland sea, where, under cover of the darkness, we might have been a thousand miles distant from all life and human habitation. The steamer plunged and throbbed on her way. Islands upreared themselves, black, solitary, and gloomy in the darkness, beautiful and romantic by day. How much we regretted that darkness. But the steamers go on their way, night and day unceasing. Yet navigation is often so difficult, that to traverse some portions by night seems almost like throwing a chance of life away; and there are a very few spots that can only be taken in daylight.

Strange and novel was the sensation of crossing this lake at mid-

night, no lights about but our own, and the reflections of the stars upon the water; nothing to break or startle the solemn stillness but the cry of some bird disturbed by our passage, escaping from one little island to another.

It was growing cold. Everyone had long ago succumbed to sleep. Even the contradictory old gentleman—who ought to have been on deck, lively as a cricket, and enjoying the night air—had turned in, as we have seen; and being a lover of arctic regions and east winds, no doubt was comfortably snoring—I am sure he snored—rolled up in a dozen blankets, door closed, curtain drawn, scuttle screwed up tight. But there comes an end to all things: the longest day, the most troubled life, all the burden of sorrow: and there comes a moment when the lids grow heavy, and the steps flag, and we too must turn in for a long, last sleep.

The next morning found the steamer still on her way, but very far from her destination. It was only Tuesday, and Stockholm would not be reached before Wednesday evening.

All day long the journey was one of interest and beauty. Now steaming up between the banks of the canal, sometimes so narrow that one wondered what would be done if two vessels met. They never do meet in these straits. Where they cannot see ahead they whistle and rouse echoes in the neighbourhood, and the one steamer waits in a sufficiently wide part until the other has gone by.

We called at many places during the day, discharging small cargo, exchanging passengers. Our numbers never seemed to decrease, but rather the contrary. Now we passed through locks, single, double, sometimes four or five in number; permitting one to land and enjoy long walks on the banks—which so greatly added to the charm and pleasure of the journey; and now we launched forth from the narrow canal into the open freedom of a lake.

Lake Wettern was especially lovely, and its banks were not destitute of towns and villages, and other signs of life. Most interesting from a distance—for we did not go out of our way to call there—was Vadstena: ancient looking and dignified, reposing on quiet slopes above the lake. Here, too, was the ancient monastery of St. Brigitta, founded in the fourteenth century, now unromantically turned into a lunatic asylum. Many wished to stop here, but the steamer was inexorable. At Motola she did call; but the place, chiefly famous for its immense ironworks and manufactories, was as prosy in its associations and surroundings as Vadstena was romantic. Yet, like the famous city of Lisbon, so beautiful from the water, so commonplace in itself, perhaps distance also lent enchantment to the charms of Vadstena. We consoled ourselves with the thought.

One portion of the canal—that lying between Lake Wettern and Lake Roxen—was perhaps the most beautiful of all. The water was above the level of the land, and we looked down upon a road overshadowed by trees, with a charming country beyond, and fertile

gardens adorned with profusions of flowers of rich colour, that scented the air we passed through. There were velvety lawns and park-like grounds, and orchards laden with cherry trees. We had found nothing prettier of its kind ; nothing that looked so much like a delicious bit of England transplanted to the middle of Sweden, flourishing under northern skies. Everyone went into a series of crescendo harmonies of rapture, which the Swedish ladies turned into FF. discords as they were wafted out of reach of those tantalising cherry orchards. On some portions of our journey the woods were magnificent; large, fine trees stretching far as the eye could reach, many of them oaks of splendid growth.

When night had fallen we reached a spot where seven locks had to be passed, giving time for a walk under the stars. Yet few were enterprising enough to leave the vessel. Tall trees lined the roadside. We went down the rapidly descending pathway, leaving the steamer behind us. She looked weird and monstrous in the surrounding darkness, yet cheerful with all her side lights, and mast lights, and cabin lights—red, green and white—flashing out in the blackness of night. And watching, every now and then, as one lock was closed and another opened, one saw her gradually descending as by some mysterious process, ten feet in the world ; then moving on to the next lock, and there stationary again for a time.

We came to the end of the road, and apparently, to the end of all things. A tiny pier, and a miniature lighthouse, from which flashed a beacon over the waters of Lake Roxen. There was not a creature in sight, not a sound to be heard, not a nightbird to cleave the air with startling cry. Isolated, infinitely sad and solitary, looked the lake, its near waters dimly lighted by the lamp in that small lighthouse.

We turned away almost with a shudder. Far ahead of us, a mile above the earth as it seemed in the darkness, was that flashing, throbbing steamer, coming down the series of locks, step by step, with solemn steps and slow. We went back and sat upon the middle of the last lock of all, and watched the black water below us rising. The further gates opened ; she passed through, a thing of life, and slowly bore down upon us to within a foot of our heads. It required some nerve to keep one's seat in all that mysterious gloom. Suppose the engines failed to answer at the right moment? Crash and chaos would go the gates, and everything and everyone about them —whilst the unconscious mass swept out into Lake Roxen as if nothing had happened.

Nothing did happen. She stopped at the right moment, and we took advantage of our last chance of getting on board. Not many minutes after, she passed through the last lock, and launched on the lake. Soon nothing was left to tell the tale of what had been but a gleam from that little lighthouse, which, as we gradually receded, flashed more and more starlight in the darkness.

So once more from the broad waters of a lake we bade good-night to the world.

Our last day dawned. After all, we should not be sorry to reach Stockholm. Three days, pleasant and enjoyable as they were, singular and uncommon though the experience, yet sufficed. Had the voyage lasted a week, I think we should have got out somewhere and finished the journey by train : as the mysterious lady must have done, or she never could have reappeared in all her splendour at Stockholm, destroying lovely and romantic mermaiden illusions, and proving herself mortal after all.

But the last day was not the least pleasant ; with the exception of that part where, launching out for a time into the Baltic, there was nothing to arrest attention. Before entering the wider waters, the arm running up to Norrkoping had been singularly beautiful. Romantic banks and small islands, all clothed with so rich a verdure and so well-wooded, that the scene, as we glided along, was that of an earthly paradise. In the Baltic there was a distinct swell upon the water which caused a good many to turn suddenly quiet, and others to disappear altogether. It did not last many hours. We left the wider waters and passed up into the arm leading to Södertelge.

Here, just before entering the last portion of the canal, we were near meeting with an adventure. As nearly as possible the Ceres ran aground, and only saved herself by performing a series of evolutions which lasted about half-an-hour, and brought her again into deep waters. All this had not been quite lost time. We were at the mouth of the very narrow canal leading up to Södertelge, and a steamer out of sight, but fortunately not out of sound, had been energetically using her whistle and warning us of rocks ahead. Endeavouring to keep clear of one danger, we had nearly fallen into another.

The short canal proved one of the most interesting bits of the whole journey. Banks were sylvan and wooded with slender and beautiful trees, and adorned with wild flowers. The canal was so narrow there seemed scarcely an inch of room to spare, and one could easily have jumped from the vessel to the flower-gemmed shore, which sloped far above our heads.

Then came Södertelge, an ancient and flourishing town, and a much frequented bathing place. Old women crowded the sides with large baskets of twisted cakes, which we tried, because the guide books recommended them as simply ambrosia. And trying them, we straightway repented. The avidity with which they were bought up was all the more amazing. The town seemed to promise well as a place of sojourn. Ahead of us, high in the air, was the railway bridge—which presently swung round and opened to allow us to pass.

Very soon after, we turned into Lake Malaren. The interest of the journey, as far as the actual canal was concerned, was over. The lake itself has infinite beauties, but as we shall return to it we will

not touch upon them to-day. Nor, indeed, were they apparent. The sun had gone in, a bitterly cold wind was blowing, occasionally a little rain fell. The old gentleman who went through life by the rules of contrary, a fur cap well over his ears, his hands in woollen gloves plunged in the pockets of a capacious great coat, a thick rug over his shoulders, was stamping about and vowing that this was splendid ; far better than all the sunshine and west winds and southern climates that ever visited this earth.

Under the circumstances the lake seemed interminable. Hour after hour passed and Stockholm did not appear. At length a distant vision as of a great town ; church steeples ; heights where houses did duty for trees : and we saw the beginning of the end. Nearer and nearer grew the vision. Bridges and palaces opened up : a distant sound as of a surging multitude : the busy hum of human bees in a hive : a crowd of vessels in all directions : quays that appeared to run up into the very centre of the town, a mixture of curves and angles and straight lines : a number of people that seemed amazing and confusing after our late experiences : a skilful piloting through steamers darting about in all directions, amongst vessels outward and homeward bound : a dazzling array of flags flying and flapping in the wind : a confused clashing of church clocks striking the hour of six : a consignment of goods and chattels to the wakeful and watchful messenger from the Grand Hotel : and ourselves with undisguised pleasure, threading the streets of this Venice of the North.

TO A SNOWDROP!

"Tiny flower of snow ;
Little silver bell,
Tell us what you know—
What you've come to tell!

"In the ice and snow
Popping up your head ;
Tell us why you grow
In your frosty bed.

"While all else is dead,
You alone arise,
Lifting up your head
To the wintry skies!"

"Child of frost and snow,
Firstling of the year,
I am come to show
That the spring is near.

"While the others sleep
Soundly down below,
I come up to peep
How the seasons go.

"Till they hear my bell
Sounding through the snow,
All the buds know well
'Tis too soon to blow."

A. H. T.

THE FIGHT AT THE FARM HOUSE.

AN INCIDENT OF THE ZULU WAR.

By Lieut.-Colonel John Mahony, C.M.G.

A PARTY of five horsemen well armed and mounted, though the state of their horses showed they had been ridden hard, were proceeding at a good pace in the direction of Ladysmith, in the Colony of Natal. Behind them lay the bleak plateau of Helpmakaar, and beyond that again, the steep, precipitous defile that led to Rorke's Drift.

The party consisted of Major Maitland, of the 24th Regiment; Lieut. Cochrane of the 32nd; Dr. Goodeve, a civilian medical practitioner, doing duty with the troops; the principal Medical Officer, Surgeon General Andrews; and Capt. Ferrars of the Natal Mounted Police, who had been wounded in the action of Isandhlwana.

Night was coming on, and they were on the look out for some place to put up at.

"We cannot go much further," said Major Maitland, pulling up his horse. "I wish we could get shelter somewhere for the night. The rain is increasing, and it will be pitch dark in ten minutes. You know this part, Willie," he added, addressing Lieutenant Cochrane. "Ride on and see if there is any sign of a house."

"There used to be a Farm about here," was the reply. "The light is not sufficient to make out its whereabouts, but I'll have a try."

"I don't think Captain Ferrars will be able to go much further, sir," said Dr. Goodeve, coming up. "He's been reeling in the saddle for the last few miles, and I'm afraid the bandages have become loosened."

"I think I remember passing a house, somewhere in this direction, on my way up," observed Dr. Andrews. "At all events let us dismount and try if we can discover it. Poor Ferrars is, I am afraid, in a bad way."

The rain by this time was coming down in torrents, and the party, leading their horses through the darkness that had followed the last streak of departing daylight, went plodding along up to their knees in mud.

After they had proceeded some distance, Captain Ferrars, who was supported by the two doctors, begged to be allowed to rest. "It's no use," he said, faintly. "I think I'm done for. Don't take any more trouble. Thank you all very much for your kindness.—Dr. Andrews," he whispered, "there's a pocket book inside my jacket; please take it and give it to my wife. And—" he added, falteringly, "she would like a lock of my hair, if you can manage it by-and-by."

"Keep up your spirits, Ferrars," said Major Maitland, cheerily; "you'll be all right if you can get a little rest. Cochrane has just discovered a ruined kraal, which he remembers was in the vicinity of Boshoff's Farm, and we may soon hope to reach a place of shelter."

He was answered by a deep sigh.

They proceeded through the thick mud for some time, while the rain continued to pour down pitilessly, and the outlook was getting a little dismal, when a shout from Lieutenant Cochrane, informed them that they were on the right track.

After making their way through a thick plantation they reached a house, and soon scrambled on to the stoep. No answer was returned to their repeated shouts.

"Try the door, Cochrane," said Major Maitland; "we must get inside somehow."

"I have been all round the house, sir, and every entry has been barred up," he replied.

"Then we must force the door. Bring here a couple of rifles."

"Don't do that," said Dr. Andrews. "It's an invasion of private property and might get us into trouble. The Duke of Wellington would have hanged one for less. Here's a small square window: could not someone get in by that?"

"Never mind, Doctor; the dear old Duke is not here now, so we must take our chance. As for the window, it might be possible for an acrobat to manage the feat, but I doubt anyone here being able to do so."

A half-dozen blows from the butt end of a rifle soon knocked away the fastenings of the door, which had only been barred across from the inside; and the party entered.

Some matches were procured and a light struck, which disclosed the usual sitting-room of a Dutch farmer. Some home-made candles were hanging on a string against the wall, a couple of which they cut off and lit, and then proceeded to explore their surroundings.

The occupants had evidently left in a very great hurry. A Dutch clock was ticking solemnly in a corner; there were plates, knives and forks, dishes and saucepans, salt, pepper, et hoc genus omne lying about, "in most admired disorder." And there was also a substantial sofa, which was at once utilised for Captain Ferrars.

Further examination showed a couple of bed-rooms containing bedsteads with interlaced reims for sacking, but no bed clothes.

In the kitchen was their greatest "find," a large pile of cut firewood, and a bag of flour. A good fire was at once prepared, and Captain Ferrars on the sofa placed in its vicinity.

"Has anyone got a drop of spirits of any sort?" enquired Dr. Goodeve. "I've given Ferrars the last drop in my flask." But unfortunately none could be produced. "It's unlucky," said the kind-hearted medico; "a little brandy would be priceless to Ferrars just now."

"Let us do the best we can," said the Major, "and collect all the edibles we have amongst us, in order to knock up a meal of some sort."

"Hullo!" said Lieutenant Cochrane, "what's that?" as a sound struck on his ears.

"It's uncommonly like the cackle of a goose," said Major Maitland. "If the guileless bird has been obliging enough to put in an appearance, he must, I regret to say, suffer on account of his confiding nature. I suppose they omitted to carry him away with the rest of the live stock."

Lieutenant Cochrane, who had established himself as head cook, took his rifle and passed out to the rear of the building.

Presently a shot was heard, and in a few moments that warrior returned holding a fine goose by the neck.

This was welcomed with a shout of approval, and the other contributions were a packet of compressed tea from Dr. Andrews, a sausage from the Major, and a tin of Van Houten's chocolate from Lieutenant Cochrane: the latter condiment being reserved for Captain Ferrars, who had by this time had his wound attended to, and his clothing dried.

In a little while, a by no means bad meal (under the circumstances) was turned out. The goose after being plucked—in which operation all assisted—was boiled in a thick casing of paste made from the flour found in the house, from which also were constructed some dumplings of a rather primitive kind, enclosing the Major's sausage chopped up small. This, aided by a decoction of the compressed tea, put a little life into the weary, washed-out party, poor Captain Ferrars even rallying to the occasion.

Their clothes having by this time been dried, some little warmth began to pervade their limbs, and they commenced casting about for a spot to sleep in, when they were startled by loud shouts in front of the house.

Major Maitland went to the door, and cautiously opening it, asked who was there.

"A friend," was the reply. "For Heaven's sake let me in. I am pursued by Zulus, and have had a bad fall jumping the fence in the dark. My horse is staked, and I fear the poor beast must be dead by this time."

They immediately went to his assistance and helped him on to the stoep.

"Why, it's Bridgman of the Commissariat!" said Lieutenant Cochrane, coming forward.

"Yes! I've had a narrow squeak, I assure you. I left Dundee this afternoon and lost my way. As the light was failing I came upon a lot of Zulus, who let fly a shower of assegais, and also fired several shots, missing me, though, I am thankful to say. Ramming in the spurs, I rode off without thinking much of where I was going, and

managed to give the devils the slip in the dark, making for where I saw your lights. I daresay you will receive a visit from them, for they will be attracted by the lights, as I was."

"Out with the light," said Major Maitland, rapidly. "Slack down the fire, put all the spare coats against the windows, knock a loop-hole or two in the doors and windows, put one saddle in the small window, from behind which one man can fire, and pile the remainder on the stoep, in front of the door. Lucky we have plenty of ammunition! Go out, Cochrane, and let the horses loose on the veldt; they'll stand no chance, pent up in the stable, should we be attacked."

"Bridgman, have you any brandy? Ferrars, of the Mounted Police, is here, badly hurt, and we have no stimulant to give him."

"I've a flask untouched. It was filled before leaving Dundee, and I've not had a chance of opening it since."

"Bravo!" said Dr. Andrews; "that's capital. I hope we shall be able to pull Ferrars through, after all."

Everyone now betook him to the post to which he had been allotted and silently awaited events.

They had hardly placed themselves, when a most infernal yelling was heard outside, followed by a volley of musketry, and then the patter of bare feet on the stoep.

Waiting until he thought he could make the most effectual use of his small force, the Major directed that no shot was to be fired without his word of command.

As the stoep became crowded, and others thronged round the house, his voice rang out. "Ready! Fire!"

The five rifles poured their fire through the improvised loop-holes, into the dense mass round the house, and the stoep was cleared like magic; on which there followed a dead silence.

After an interval of some minutes, a harsh voice, speaking in Zulu, was heard giving orders, followed by what appeared to be words of command; then a sudden rush of a body of men, who hurled themselves upon the door, which gave way with a crash.

"All to the door!" shouted the Major, and the next instant they were in hand to hand conflict with the foremost Zulus. Those who succeeded in entering were instantly shot down, and flung back upon the others, forming a sort of rampart to the defenders, who, their eyes being more accustomed to the light, could better discern their opponents.

This mêlée continued for some little time, but the darkness was so intense that the Zulus became doubtful and wavered. One had got hold of Captain Bridgman's rifle by the muzzle, and was trying to wrench it from him. "Hold on, Johnny," he said, coolly; "I'll talk to you in a minute," and managed to insert a cartridge in his breech-loader. Then pulling the trigger without moving the rifle from his hip, the Zulu fell back dead.

The known aversion of the native warrior to enter buildings or

works of any kind when fighting—though he fears nothing in the open—caused them again to retire on finding so stubborn a resistance; and the little party had time to replace the door, which they secured with the tough reims taken from the frames of the bedsteads, and were enabled to take breath.

All this time, Captain Ferrars was helplessly moaning at his inability to join in the fight.

"Is anyone hurt?" said the Major, looking round.

"I've been hit," replied Dr. Goodeve, "but I don't think it's much. A Zulu struck me in the side with his assegai, just as we drove them out."

"Come to the kitchen fire," said Dr. Andrews, "and let me look at it."

"Oh, I am all right," he remarked, but at that moment he reeled and fell.

"Get a light and hide it as much as possible; stand round, everyone," said Dr. Andrews.

The Doctor opened the fallen man's jacket, examined his side, felt his pulse, placed his hand on his heart, and looked up.

"Is he coming round?" whispered the Major.

"He is dead!" answered the Doctor, solemnly.

It is a remarkable fact that, though he had received a mortal wound, he had continued to speak and act as though nothing were the matter with him; ultimately expiring without a pang.

Having placed poor Dr. Goodeve carefully in one of the bedrooms, they once again proceeded to take measures for their own safety.

Stealthy sounds outside prepared them for another attempt on the part of their enemies, the nature of which they were soon made aware.

A flickering light in the direction of an outhouse at the back, called their attention in that direction, and they soon saw it was the intention to burn them out. As the light increased, they comprehended what had been done: a large store of firewood stacked in the outhouse was in a blaze, and burning brands from thence were being brought and laid round the house.

"Pick off every man who approaches," said the Major. "All fire now independently."

The figures of the Zulus became now perfectly distinct in the light, and those inside were able to pick off man after man with unerring precision. At length they appeared to come to the conclusion that, owing to the heavy rain that had fallen, the attempt to fire the house would not succeed, so they again retired to re-arrange their plan of attack.

It turned out that the light from the burning wood-stack was of great service to the little garrison, as it enabled them to see the movements of their adversaries while they themselves were in

shadow: waiting in some anxiety to know what would be the next move, feeling that their position was becoming critical, and unless the firing attracted some party, proceeding to, or returning from the front, they must make up their minds for the worst.

Looking round, the Major said: "If it comes to a last stand we'll make it in this small room," pointing to one off the sitting-room. "The door is narrow, and we can hold it while the ammunition lasts; after that, do the best we can with clubbed rifles. Our only chance is to hold out, in case the firing should be heard by our friends."

Captain Ferrars was moved into the room indicated and all made ready for the final struggle.

Everything was quiet for a considerable time, and a faint hope was beginning to dawn that their foes had given the business up and retired.

Presently a shot was heard, and then came a rush like a whirlwind, hoarse yells and words of command; the doors both back and front were attacked and the house trembled with the shock.

"Keep cool, everyone. Keep your eye upon the doors, and when they enter, pour into the thick of 'em; then make for the small room."

The house seemed to rock from the force that was brought against it, while one Zulu had found out the little window at the side of the door, and was forcing his way in, head first. Captain Bridgman raised his rifle to fire.

"Steady a bit," shouted the Major; "don't waste ammunition." And stepping quickly forward, brought his clubbed rifle on the bare skull of the intruder, who fell head downwards, partly in and partly out of the window.

The doors at length gave way and in poured the enemy; one steady volley did good execution on the crowded mass, and then all made for the small room.

They fastened a bedstead across the lower part of the doorway, leaving the upper part open, and then the four men placed themselves well back, two on each side of the door, through which came showers of assegais; but the room was so favourably placed that the interior was in complete darkness, while the assailants were plainly visible.

One of the Zulu leaders outside was now heard shouting instructions, and after a little time, eight or ten men appeared with pieces of blazing wood, which threw a light upon the interior of the room, destroying the only chance of the defenders.

A native, bolder than the rest, got in over the obstacle at the door, but was soon despatched. Another and another, however, quickly followed. Major Maitland was wounded in two places, Captain Bridgman was shot in the mouth, Lieutenant Cochrane was engaging a couple of gigantic Zulus, and though wounded managed to keep his assailants at bay. Dr. Andrews, cool and collected, and

the only one unwounded, had taken to his revolver, and placing his back to the wall, against which Captain Ferrars had been placed for safety, and in front of that gentleman, successfully held his own.

Each one of the little party now felt that his last hour had come, but sternly determined to fight to the end. Just as the complete hopelessness of their position was forced upon them, there came a sharp volley of musketry from the outside, followed by a quick dropping fire, and then the welcome sound of English voices.

The Zulus turned to face their new enemies, but disheartened by the continued dropping of their comrades beside them, and not knowing the strength of the force they had to contend with, made up their minds to decamp, leaving the little garrison free; rescued literally from the jaws of death.

After a farewell volley at the retreating foe, the rescuing party entered the house.

Foremost came the burly form of Piet Uys, the brave Dutchman, who had stood by the English from first to last, their true and loyal friend, followed by a tall man in cords and boots, and slouched hat of the irregular cavalry. This was Major Bettington, Commandant of "Bettington's Horse," one of the most dashing of partisan leaders, who with some specially selected men of his corps, constituted the relieving force.

Piet Uys it appeared, had heard the firing at the commencement of the attack, and riding forward soon discovered how matters stood. He knew there was no force nearer than Helpmakaar, and that consisted only of Infantry; but in the morning he had passed, proceeding from Ladysmith en route for Pietermaritzburg, "Bettington's Horse." Thinking over the chances, he made up his mind to ride, and, if possible, overtake Bettington, who, he calculated, would halt at "Currie's Post," between Bushman's Pass and the Umgani falls; and if he succeeded could conduct the party by a short cut across country to the scene of action.

Acting promptly on this, he rode hard into Ladysmith, apprising the Resident Magistrate, Mr. Moody, of the Zulu attack, and then went at racing pace for "Currie's Post."

Mr. Moody at once organised a party to proceed on foot with stretchers and medical appliances for any that might be wounded, should the relieving force reach in time to be of use to the beleaguered party.

Piet Uys succeeded in overtaking Bettington, as he hoped, and the latter, selecting fifty of his best mounted men, followed the gallant Dutchman across country to the Farm House, with the result already mentioned.

"Well, Maitland, I'm glad to see you safe," said Bettington, shaking hands with him; "though you all seem to be pretty well mauled."

"Yes! it was a close shave, and I can't imagine how you came so opportunely—in the very nick of time."

"For that you may thank my friend Piet Uys," he answered. "If it had not been for his energetic and loyal action, you would all have been gathered to your fathers before this. However, 'All's well that ends well.' And now let us see what damage has been done."

They first turned their attention to Captain Ferrars, who, poor fellow, was in a critical state, as a bullet, rebounding from the wall, had wounded him in the side; but they did all that could be done for him.

The day was now breaking, and a trooper was sent off to Ladysmith to explain the state of affairs.

Dr. Andrews addressed himself to the task of binding up the hurts of those that had been hit, and afterwards when the sun had risen, they all went out to take a look at the scene of the conflict.

The house and grounds had a forlorn and dismal appearance. The trim flower beds and kitchen garden trampled in mud, the doors pierced with bullet holes, the smouldering fire of the burning out-house, all presented a very desolate outlook: while, in addition, there were lying about the bodies of forty or fifty dead Zulus. Many more must have been wounded, as traces of blood were subsequently followed up close to the Zulu border, which was not half an hour's walk from the house.

In the course of the day, carts and stretchers arrived, and the wounded were taken into Ladysmith, where also was conveyed the body of Dr. Goodeve for interment. There they were well cared for by the kind-hearted Resident Magistrate and, with the exception of Captain Ferrars, who was unable to be moved, were soon in condition to proceed to their destination.

Piet Uys returned to his farm, only to meet his death later on, while bravely fighting by the side of Evelyn Wood (the man with the charmed life), at Zoblana Mountain, having previously received the decoration of C.M.G. for his courage and loyalty.

The other actors in this stirring little episode are still alive and well, with the exception of Major Bettington, who died a year after, while in Command of the Mounted Police in the West Indies, to which he had been appointed in recognition of his services during the Zulu Campaign.

"Hallo, Maitland!" said a cheery voice, addressing that gentleman in the Camp at Pine Town some months after the occurrences narrated here.

"What, Ferrars!" said the Major, heartily, shaking his hand. "I am right glad to meet you, for I thought I had seen the last of you after that affair at Boshoff's Farm. But, thank God, you are all right again."

"Yes! thank God!" said the other, reverently raising his hat.

THE LAST HOUR WASTED.

By the Author of "Adonais, Q.C."

SHE was an exceedingly beautiful young woman; tall and straight, and proud-looking;—divinely so. He carriage was a thing of beauty in itself. Her features—especially the eyes—were of that sensitive order inexpressibly charming, possessing the capability of guarding and bearing about with them the impress of every chance reflection. After a morning's walk amongst the glad corn-fields, and sparkling torrents, and twittering larks, and sunny, dancing atmosphere—let it pour as it might in the afternoon, the eyes would have a subdued light of sunshine in them, all through it. In the midst of the lights and laughter and gay talk of a ball-room there would still be that look in her eyes, just as if she was for ever full of strong emotion, and unanswerable queries. She knew nothing of it herself, and there were few who had ever seemed to notice or define this characteristic in her; but to all men, and at all times, she was allowed to be exceedingly, strangely beautiful.

It was summer. She was in one of those quaint-shaped rooms, full of comfortable little nooks and corners only to be met with in very old houses. The furniture was of dark oak, the same colour as the rafters, and one end of the room was actually a step lower than the other. There was a piano in one corner—a harp in another—over there an easel—a guitar upon a heap of music lying here. Books in that dark corner again—if the dreamy gloom of crimson and purple drifting through these two little stained-glass windows could be called darkness.

At this end two windows were opened to their widest. The summer wind swept through a forest of trees, whose leaves actually tapped the panes, and wafted new sweet scents out of a large bowl of roses. It would have been difficult to know what to call this room. If owned by a man it would have been his "den:"—boudoir was a feeble name for it as belonging to this girl. At any rate, these seemed only fitly charming surroundings for so charming a looking woman.

There was a little writing-table between the two open windows, and it was before this that she stood. Upon the drawn-out desk there lay quite a little pile of scented note-paper, whose delicate aroma mingled with the scent of the roses. Each sheet—one peeping out beyond the other—was stamped with a dainty monogram.

As she stood here, looking straight out of the window before her, she toyed somewhat nervously with the pen lying in her right hand. Presently her left hand—what beautiful, white, shapely hands the girl had—fell upon the pile of paper, so as to obscure the monogram.

Her eyes still looked straight before her, just at a little peep of deep blue sky, which strangely enough was precisely of their own shade.

Anyone seeing her for the first time at this moment would have said that she was too much like a statue—too cold-looking. But the exercise of a moment's patience would have changed their opinion; for suddenly a warm pale pink blush—reminding one again of the roses—covered her face; and the blue eyes turned down now upon the paper were soft and misty as they had before been brilliant.

Rather abruptly she sat down, dipped the pen into the ink-bottle, and began to write.

There was no living thing here to spy on her, save a drowsy bee; and a certain dolefulness in its monotonous hum made the fact plain that this bee was far too wrapped up in its own sorrows to pay the least attention to the lady's.

While the bee hummed on, and the breezes whispered, and the dull coloured beams glided silently in over at yonder corner, this was what the girl wrote.

I sometimes think that had circumstances been differently ordered, I should have become an authoress. I can never remember the time when it was not much more easy, much more natural, for me to give vent to any strong emotion upon paper than in the ordinary way. And again, if there was anything I wanted to be quite clear about, I had to weigh it well with pen and paper—to read over and study my own meditations. I believe this habit has shielded me from a great deal of trouble. It has ensured my keeping all violent expression of feeling—any display of which I inexpressibly dislike—to myself. I have also found that decisions arrived at in this way have, as a rule, been fairly correct, such as I have not afterwards regretted.

Perhaps I am wrong in thinking I could have written for the amusement of others, for, after all, I believe I have no creative powers. The exactitude with which I always summed up anything I wished to consider, as any emotion to be expressed, quenched that in me long ago. Or, perhaps, this very exactitude gives the denial to the existence of any such power at any period of life. I do not know.

I am quite ready to act according to the will of those who ought to know best upon the point I wish to consider now. But, before consenting to do this, I must satisfy myself that there shall be no regretting, no looking back on my past. I am not going to blind myself with the fair picture they point out to me, of a life of useful happiness and power. They ought to know best about that, certainly, as they have had so much more experience than I; but then there is this small item in the consideration which they do not realise—myself.

If I were in their place, I should judge as they do. Knowing, alone, all about myself and my past, it would be madness to rush into any project without having reviewed in black and white, under my own

eyes, what I alone know of that past, and of myself. To be quite plain—as I always am upon paper—I am not sure that I realise that anything—any change—can be of very much moment in my life now, so far as personal happiness is concerned. I can see the dead level of the future stretching before me. Follow this course or that course, yonder dead level neither sinks nor rises.

But that has nothing to do with the subject under consideration. As matters now stand, I want to act for the best. I *must* have the whole matter under my own eyes to read, as if I were someone else, reading and judging from an outside point of view. After thorough consideration, as I said before, whatever decision I arrive at, there can be no longer any excuse for regret.

I feel as if I should like to begin with a description of *him*. And yet to do so at once would be out of order; for when I first saw him I did not know his name; and, before I even saw him, I had heard his voice.—How bitterly cold it surely is, this summer afternoon, even here in the sunshine.

I first met him in a railway-carriage. I was travelling betwixt Peterborough and a little place called Maleswood, in the month of September, two years ago, and he entered the carriage. It is true that I did not see him get in, for I was leaning back with my eyes closed; but I was conscious that the door at the further end opened and closed again.

After a few minutes, through my own thoughts, a voice of a very peculiar tone gradually forced itself upon my attention. There was another voice too, which monopolised most of the talking; but this one answered now and again; and as now and again broke into a laugh. It is a fact that in ten minutes I was literally spell-bound; very much amused at myself for the interest I took in the voice, and yet afraid, *afraid* to open my eyes, sure that the enchantment must be broken if I did so.

I am not romantic, and I had never experienced anything like this before. I believe that when the entrance was made into the carriage I had been in the midst of a very prosaic calculation as to whether I could afford a new seal-skin jacket out of my quarter's allowance. It was a calculation which I never finished. I am afraid I am developing strange peculiarities, for the sight of a seal-skin jacket now always makes me shudder. I shall never again wear one.

As to the nature of the voice, I cannot describe it. It was deep and ringing, of very distinct utterance. But there was a certain vibration and tone about it which I had never before noticed in any voice. I have heard its peculiar beauty remarked upon by scores of indifferent people since. It was perhaps a voice which would suggest, speaking, that it might belong to a great singer. And yet of all men surely Captain Allison must be the most unmusical; he is no singer.

Whilst I sat there with my eyes closed, listening with something

like suppressed anger against myself to the voice, our train stopped at a station; some little country place, of which I have forgotten the name. There were some schoolboys laughing and dodging about on the platform, and a momentary hush had fallen over the carriage. Suddenly there was a rapid movement, and then the voice rang out once more, this time so loud and rapid as to startle me.

"Look here, I say! What are you doing to that kitten? Just leave it alone, will you."

I was still under the spell. At any other period of my life I should have opened my eyes, of course, to see what was the matter. Instead of that I remained perfectly motionless to listen.

"What are you doing, I say?" continued the voice sharply. "Are you dumb? Can't you speak? I don't wonder—inhuman little wretches! Hand that kitten to me."

The same instant the engine whistled and the train began to move. There was the sound of money thrown on to the platform, accompanied by a running series of uncomplimentary epithets; then the window was pulled rapidly up. Something that sounded like a long sigh of suppressed astonishment broke the momentary pause, and the voice which I have alluded to as monopolising most of the conversation, spoke.

"Well, upon my word, Allison! that *is* rather an odd idea. And now, if you will excuse me, what are you going to do with the kitten?"

The other laughed; an impatient, nervous laugh.

"I can't bear to see a poor animal suffer. Yet it's an abominable nuisance, isn't it, having it here?"

There was a slight pause before the first speaker answered again. He was evidently lost in wonder.

"Pity you didn't think of shutting your eyes," he said, in rather a cynical tone, for which I felt a flash of anger pass over me; "or of simply leaning back. In that case you wouldn't have seen much of the suffering kitten, considering the limited number of seconds we stopped at the station."

The other laughed again. From the nature of the sound, I could fancy his head was turned aside, as he perhaps stooped to caress the kitten.

"The cold-blooded little monsters were actually delighting in its tortures beforehand," he went on. "Did you see? they were getting ready to hang it up to the signal-post. Fancy watching a kitten in agonies. I couldn't have stood that, Brown; I really couldn't. If there is one thing I always did object to, it was to witness any kind of suffering. Poor little kitten!"

"My dear fellow," resumed the first speaker—and I fancied there was considerable amusement in his tone now—"we remained in that station something like one minute and forty-five seconds. Allow me to point out to you again that you could have witnessed very little in this particular instance."

"I know," replied the strange voice. "Poor little kitten! I fancied it was ten minutes we stayed there, not two. In ten, you know, we should have had ample time to see it. I wish you had stopped me at the moment."

Listening to this, of course, it never even occurred to me that he could mean what he said. Long after I had the conviction brought home to my mind that he most implicitly did mean it.

The train was now going very fast, the carriage swaying wildly about and flying on. I knew that we must soon come to the junction at which I was to change. I raised myself slowly in my seat. I cannot describe the strange emotion which possessed me as I did so, and opened my eyes. I must pause for a moment, and think, in order to picture the scene; in order to describe more exactly the face which confronted mine.

I have known women about whom one never seemed to remark, or afterwards remember, anything but the eyes. It is thus when I try to picture Captain Allison's face to myself. I can recollect nothing but the eyes, as I then first looked at them. They were perhaps the darkest I had ever seen; perfectly black, indeed; of unusual size; not hard, but, on the contrary, very sympathetic.

In the case of women with very remarkable eyes I have generally found that the other features have been commonplace rather than otherwise; neither worthy of admiration nor the reverse. That is how, I suppose, one can recollect the eyes so well; the unnoticeable features make a fine setting.

In Captain Allison this order of things was broken, perhaps because he was a man. Most people would have remembered every one of the other features, studied them perhaps, on account of their downright ugliness. The word is perfectly proper in its application. They really are, I know, positively ugly features.

Sometimes I find myself speaking in the present, and sometimes in the past: it is only now and again I can realise that I am telling a story whose opening chapters date but two years ago. But it is so painful to speak in the present that I think I shall put the remainder in the past tense. I shall be better able to arrive at a proper judgment if I look at it in that way.

His mouth slightly drooped at one side, giving the face a cynical expression; but the upper lip was entirely hidden by a long, straight, very black moustache—as black as the eyes. The nose was thin as a knife, and straight; but I don't think it was well shaped. I have heard people laugh at the exaggerated arch of the nostrils. There were odd bushy eyebrows, which added to the effect of the eyes. The face itself was extremely thin and bony, sloping to a point at the chin, its complexion almost dark as a creole's. I see I can recollect the details of the other features quite well, and yet there have only *lived* to me, ever, the eyes. There was nothing remarkable in his figure, which was of medium height. He wore a very long coat that

day, heavily trimmed with fur, although it was only autumn. He had two other good points in his appearance, which I had better note. His hair was of the peculiar blue black colour which is so beautiful, although more particularly so in a woman, and his hands were finely shaped, and white. I observed them both in that first minute, for his hat lay on the seat beside him, and with one of his white hands he was stroking the little black kitten.

As I raised myself slowly, I came face to face with these eyes, bent curiously upon me; the eyebrows were lowered over them a little. Captain Allison was sometimes rather short-sighted. He told me afterwards—and I think, again, that he was speaking the truth—that until I slowly raised myself he had not even remarked my presence in the carriage, and that the moment I began to do so it struck him that I was a particularly pretty woman.

We looked at each other thus, immovably, for about five slow seconds. I was fascinated, powerless. Those eyes were as difficult to shake off as the voice. I had never done anything so awkward before, or felt so annoyed. He apologised to me afterwards for the way in which he had stared. He said I surprised him. No doubt the interest on my face must have done so.

I rose suddenly, and began to take down my wraps. When I resumed my seat, a minute or two before we got to the junction, he had leaned back, crossing his arms and closing his eyes, as if to compose himself for sleep.

When the train stopped, his friend—an ordinary-looking English gentleman—helped me out with my things; Captain Allison still maintained the same attitude. It was a long, crowded platform. The sunshine broke out as I stepped on it and made my way to the other end. I wanted to talk to the station-master. Just as I had found him, the train I had left began to move. I turned my head. The carriage I had been in was in the act of passing slowly. The same eyes, with precisely the same expression in them, were once more bent on me. I think the station-master wondered at my sudden confusion. It was not for some moments that he made me understand that in consequence of a new regulation I might have gone on to my destination, without changing, by that same train.

I was going to pay a visit at a country house, the house of a friend of my mother's. I arrived there quite safely in the long run, just in time to dress hurriedly for dinner. My hostess had been telling about the mistake in the drawing-room before I went in, and in the very doorway her husband assailed me with a storm of laughing reproaches as to my stupidity. Whilst I was trying to defend myself dinner was announced.

"Beatrice, my dear," said Mrs. Kerwin's voice behind me, "this is Captain Allison."

For one moment everything in the room before me swam. Someone was smilingly offering me his arm. The same eyes, the same man.

Dinner passed like a dream. I asked him, before it was over, what had become of the kitten. He answered pleasantly, with a little laugh, that he had turned it loose in the Maleswood High Street as he came along. Once again, of course, I thought he was joking; how could I imagine otherwise? All the stray dogs and cats in the kingdom seemed to collect in that Maleswood High Street, and I remarked that fact to him at the time, still continuing the joke about the kitten. He laughed again, but with a little shudder, and hastily turned the conversation. I thought I had never met a man so sensitive. I know that I have the reputation of being somewhat cold—unemotional, unsusceptible. It is true. When we went into the drawing-room I wasted an hour in dreaming—the first one I had so wasted for a very, very long time. When the gentlemen followed us, at last, Captain Allison came straight over and stood beside me. He knew me very well by reputation; he told me so, and I think he was much flattered by my evident interest in him.

It is useless going into all the details of the days that followed; it would take too long. I have only an hour at my command. Living in the same country house, it is easy to understand that I saw a great deal of Captain Allison.

Upon the afternoon of the fifth day, Mrs. Kerwin came into the library. It was a very wet afternoon, and I was sitting alone there.

"Oh! Beatrice," she exclaimed, "Captain Allison has just had a telegram summoning him up to Scotland—or so he says. At all events, he is going away."

She paused an instant, and added, in rather a hesitating tone:

"As your mother's friend, my dear, you will pardon my saying that I am not sorry. I could not help fearing, sometimes, that you had taken rather a fancy to him. I should have been very vexed for anything of that sort to have taken place in my house. Your parents would not have liked it."

It was very easy for her to stand there and say that to me, folding her hands and watching the tossing trees with apparent interest. At all events, it was a great deal easier for her to speak than for me to listen to the very first hint or suspicion against him that anyone had breathed to me.

"You mean to say," I remarked, composedly, "that Captain Allison is not a desirable connection. Perhaps my parents might consider it a little unfortunate, in that case, that I had been asked to meet him at all."

"Oh, my dear Beatrice," she sighed, turning away from the window with a little shrug, "with what terrific precision you do classify things. Captain Allison is considered eminently respectable, I can assure you; your parents would have him in their own house to-morrow. For all that, he is not a man to fall in love with; he has the reputation, you see, of being utterly heartless."

I breathed a long sigh of relief as I thought of the rescued kitten.

"Mrs. Kerwin," I hesitated, "that is also my own reputation. People say that I am heartless."

She turned suddenly round, and kissed me, laughing a little. "My dear, yes," she said; "but I never believed it of you. What is more, I know that you are in reality the very opposite. But you are the very oddest creature I ever met. If I had thought you heartless, I shouldn't have taken the trouble to warn you just now."

A moment or two later Captain Allison came in to say good-bye to me. He said—it was after Mrs. Kerwin had gone—that he wouldn't have believed five days could have slipped away so pleasantly in a country house in this part of the world, and at this season of the year; so desperately dull, as a rule, in his opinion.

I remarked that in Scotland it would be quite different.

"At this season it would," he answered; "but as a rule he hated the Scotch."

Really, taking him all in all, Captain Allison was one of the most truthful men I ever knew. Of course, he said other things also, before he went, the truthfulness of which I cannot so satisfactorily vouch for.

Nineteen months elapsed before I again met Captain Allison. This is nothing to the purpose, only that I should like to calculate how many hours one may possibly waste in nineteen months. I fancy, if this little room could speak as witness, it would be found that the number may be colossal, those subtracted for eating, sleeping, performing one's necessary everyday duties looking infinitesimal in proportion.

It was in April when I again met him, a day or two after our arrival in London. All this time he had been in the East, and now that he had come home he was going to send in his resignation. He was very wan and ill-looking. How could I wonder, remembering the suffering he had been called upon to witness? Through some merciful chance I had not known that his regiment was ordered to the war.

I met him by accident. We were in the theatre, and all at once I perceived him in the box opposite to ours. About the the same time his eyes lighted upon me. I saw him start and draw his eyebrows quickly together in the manner peculiar to him. At the end of the scene he came over and sat down beside us.

The Kerwins were in town and Mrs. Kerwin happened to be with us that evening.

"Just at the very first look I did not recognise you," he said, pleasantly. "If Mrs. Kerwin had not been with you I am very doubtful whether I should have known you."

"You had forgotten me!" I could not help exclaiming quickly.

"Your name alone; I had not forgotten the *face* of the most beautiful woman I ever met, Beatrice."

Captain Allison had really the pleasantest way of mitigating the effects of his truth-telling propensities that I ever knew. His compliments somehow did not offend. However, this will show that it had gone as far as that before, and that the thread of our intercourse was taken up just where it had been laid down.

Unfortunately my people were only passing through London, on their way to the south of France with one of my sisters, an invalid. I was to be left with friends. If we had all been together, I daresay I should not have seen so much of Captain Allison.

So, as fate willed it, I was again staying with an intimate acquaintance of his for my hostess; although this time he himself did not actually live in the house.

This time, however, the hostess was not an old friend of my mother's. How much she saw and how much she did not see, I cannot determine. I think she was very glad to have anyone with her who had the power of attracting Captain Allison—and consequently others—to her musical evenings. I doubt if I shall ever again accept an invitation to a musical evening.

The hour is fast drawing to a close. I had better hurry at once to the end of my narrative. I have to read it over, of course, and to consider it after I have finished.

I must next picture to myself an afternoon in the beginning of May, as warm as July might have been. Mrs. Hopetown, the lady I was staying with, had been in bed all day with headache. Something, I know not what, had given me the same. I very rarely am subject to them, and was on the drawing-room couch. Captain Allison, I knew, was in Dover. I had given orders to receive no one. We lived in rather a quiet square; there was very little to break the silence, save the sound of some passing carriage or hurrying tradesman's cart. Suddenly the door opened. I started up with an exclamation of pleased surprise, in spite of my headache. It was Captain Allison.

He was looking just as easy and pleasant as usual. And yet there was something in his face which made me pause in the act of welcoming him. He asked with great interest for all details about my headache, proffered all sorts of remedies; then left me, crossed to the end of the room, and, sitting down in the window, began to comment on the square garden. His voice sounded so natural that, reassured, I rose from the sofa to go and stand beside him. I shall never forget the sudden, quick movement he made for me to stay where I was.

"Don't, Beatrice," he said, slowly, after an instant's pause. "I have something I wish to say to you. Don't leave the sofa. I—I don't want to look at you while I say it."

I stood perfectly still, rooted to my place. There was something more than the mere shock which these words gave me. Somehow or other I seemed to have heard them before.

"Beatrice," he began, hesitatingly, with his eyes still turned towards the square; "you cannot think how much I regret being compelled to bring this news to you. But I could not bear, dearest, that you should hear it first from anyone else. They might make you think so hardly of me—and I shouldn't like you do that, Beatrice; indeed I shouldn't. I felt I would rather tell you, bad as it is, myself. To put things very plainly then, my pecuniary affairs are in such an unsatisfactory condition that I have come to the conclusion there is only one way out of the mess—to marry. I am exceedingly sorry, Beatrice. I want you to understand that that is my only reason for marrying the lady whom I am about to marry. You will hear her name in due course. There is no use troubling you with details. I want you to understand that had circumstances been different I should have acted differently: that I am giving you the true reason for my marriage. Of course you are a sensible woman. I need not explain that it is only to you I would speak so openly."

Whenever I feel weak I will remember how I acted at that moment; the recollection may nerve me into strong action often again. In that one short speech of his I had realised all, everything; seen the man's character as I had never seen it before; read all old details by this new light for the first time. It was such a shock to me that I was trembling in every nerve; and yet I went quickly up to him, to all appearance, I know, perfectly calm.

"And you do not want me to see you," I said in a low voice, "because you think it will pain me to watch your pain—that is just like your thoughtfulness. If it will do you good to show it, if I can console you, never mind my seeing—it will not hurt me. Poor Oliver."

I believe this is the first time I have written down Captain Allison's christian name.

He turned round very sharply—I had pulled a low chair up beside him to the window—and scanned my face. He kept his eyes fastened upon me for at least a minute. During the whole of that time I smiled with perfect placidity. Then suddenly his features contracted in a kind of spasm. I had never seen him so violently moved before.

"Do you mean to say," he muttered between his teeth, "that you don't care?"

I was so glad, so thankful that I had succeeded that I hardly knew what I did or spoke. I hope I may be forgiven for my duplicity. I looked at him as if in surprise for a moment longer, then broke into a hastily suppressed little laugh.

"Oliver—I care? You must have heard often, before you ever saw me—that I *cannot care*. Since then I think you ought to have found this out. You are not going to reproach me, are you?"

He had grown perfectly white. His vanity had never been so deeply wounded.

"After this," he said, "I shall never again believe in any woman."

"Oliver," cried I, quickly, "did *you* really care so very much? Oh, I am sorry; what can I do?"

He turned his eyes upon me again, with a sort of grimness this time.

"No," he replied, "you have no reason to distress yourself. *I did not care.* I little anticipated, however, having to speak so plainly. I must say that you have bitterly disappointed me, Beatrice. You have destroyed the last ray of my faith in womankind. It is one thing for me to behave as I have done in a matter such as this, entirely another thing for you, a woman."

"I hope," retorted I, still smiling, but very quickly, for I felt that unless matters soon came to a close I might betray myself, "that the woman you are about to marry understands the full honour you are doing her. Like me, she may be ignorant of the different standards of action considered honourable for men and women."

"She understands perfectly well," he said, angrily.

"I am glad to hear it," I said, holding out my hand to him. "It would be a decidedly awkward mistake, you know, if she were only to find it out afterwards. Oh, I assure you there are a great many women capable of suffering very acutely. Now, if there was one thing you always did object to it was to witness any kind of suffering, I know. Don't hazard having to be a witness of your wife's. Good-bye."

Just as she wrote the last word there was the distinct sound of wheels hurrying along down somewhere amongst the trees. She listened for a moment, her expression swiftly changing. Suddenly she began to write again with great rapidity.

I shall not have time to read this over. I am afraid I have little time left for consideration. But, after all, what good would it have done me? In what way did I propose to consider this that I have written? Ah, I know myself. It is only another record for this room to note, should it have the power of doing so. Well, this is the last hour wasted now. I have perfectly made up my mind. I hope that I have still the strength left to do that. My life shall be ruined no longer for a hopeless chimera. I repeat that this is the last hour wasted. Hopeless! It always was so. He never loved me. That was the hardest part to realise of all. Harder I do think —or, at all events, as hard—as to find out his utter worthlessness.

He never loved me! In the very middle of that time in London—I discovered it long afterwards—he had openly discussed me—my personal appearance, character, everything—in a smoking-room. No man, ever so little in love, would have done such a thing. It is, therefore, quite clear that I am facing the truth; he never loved me. I repeat that I know myself. It was only an excuse for spending

one last hour in going over the old folly, this scheme of writing it all out in order to be able to form a better judgment upon it all. And yet it is quite true that the practice has often aided me. But what kind of judgment did I expect to form? Does not woman ever act more by instinct than by judgment or reason?

Wait. Did I not say something about the recollection of a strong moment in my past life at some time strengthening me? It shall begin by doing so now.

Very abruptly she once more ceased writing, replaced her pen, and, moving calmly over to the mantelpiece, lighted a candle. She folded all the sheets of writing paper which she had used—they made a large pile—into a long envelope. She then held this steadily, determinedly, in the flame of the candle. Soon there was nothing left but a fluttering heap of black ashes. She then went slowly out of the long room, turning with rather a wistful expression at the door to look back, as though this were the last time, in some way, that she was to see it just exactly as she saw it now. A few minutes later she opened the door of a drawing-room.

As she entered, a man started from the mantelpiece, against which he had been resting his face. It was a very honest, frank face, with nothing particularly handsome about it, yet singularly attractive. The face of a man approaching his fortieth year. Just now, perhaps, it might have been interesting as a study, on account of its deadly pallor.

He stood upright, his lips moving in some sort of greeting. She bowed, and, crossing the room, stood beside him.

"May I inquire whether you have thought over what I said to you last night?" she asked, in a low tone.

The man nodded almost impatiently.

"That I am cold, heartless, utterly powerless to promise you anything but the merest regard? You have understood all that?"

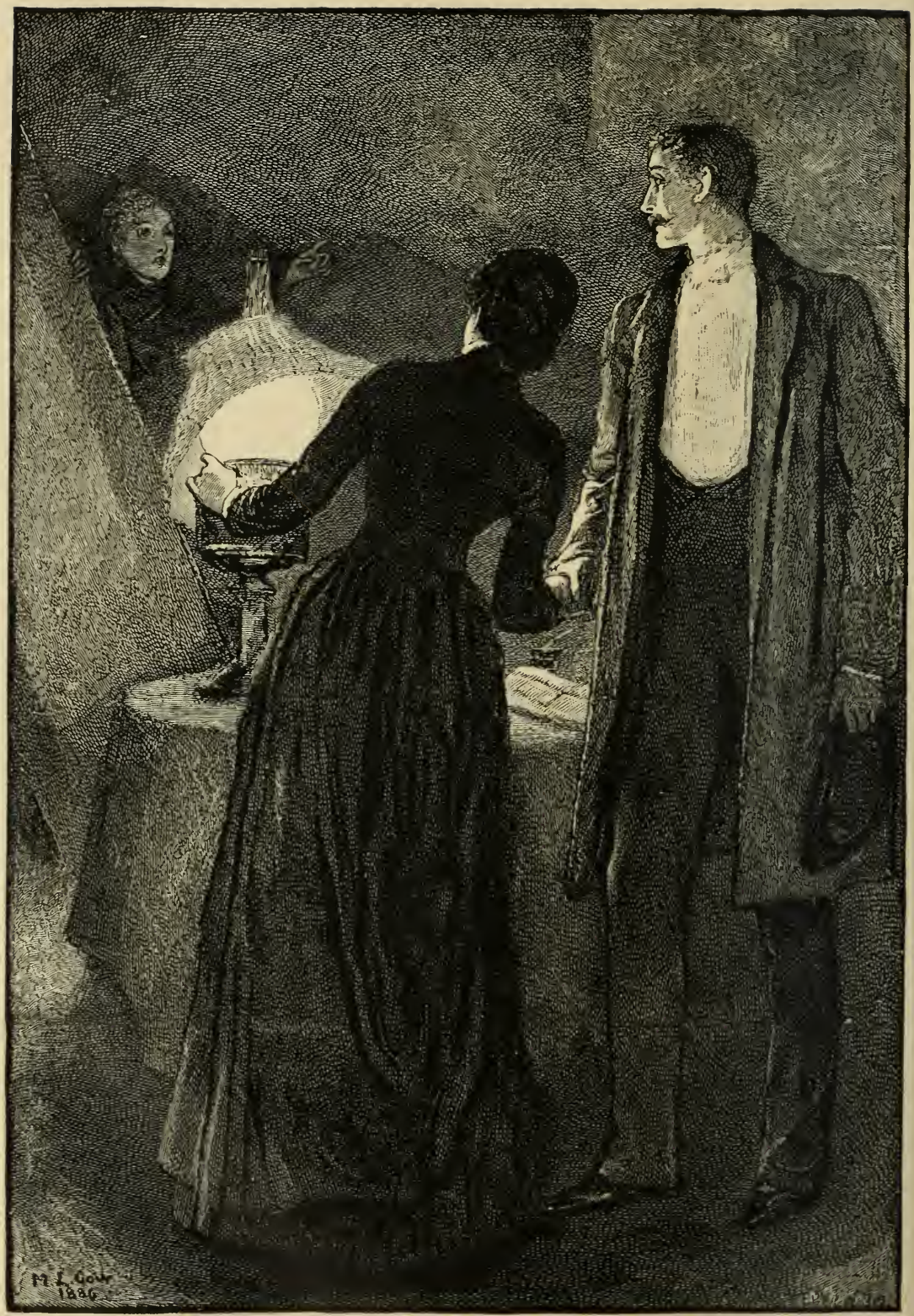
"Yes," answered the man.

She took one look at the sunshine, and then turning her head again spoke quite calmly.

"Then," she said, with a sort of little step backwards, "there only remains for me to say, Sir Edward, that I consent to become your wife."

With a stifled cry the man clasped her in his arms rapturously.

After all, she had misjudged herself. She was neither cold nor insensible. That love-clasp had unclosed the well-spring of her heart, and she knew that for the first time in her life she loved truly, fervently, and for ever.



"STAY!" CRIED AN IMPERATIVE VOICE. "HE MUST NOT GO!"

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRY IN THE DARKNESS.

IT was one thing for Edric Poynter to run down Mrs. Damien's staircase gaily, even with a touch of bravado, under the anxious gaze of Hester Archdale's bright eyes; and another to feel himself shut out by the closing of a door from warmth, light and companionship into the eerie chill of the lonely moonlit street.

"Follow the messenger," Euphrosyne had enjoined him, and he was prepared to obey, though with never so bad a grace. He scanned the length of the pavement from right to left in search of the possible bearer of the summons, and had not far to seek.

A man was lounging under the nearest gas-lamp smoking a cigarette, which, on seeing Edric approach, he promptly threw away, and advanced enquiring, "Mr. Poynter, I believe?" touching his hat as he spoke.

Edric looked at him curiously. A man of middle height, with a short grey beard concealing the lower part of his face and a hat pulled down over his eyes. His voice and action might have been those of a well-trained gentleman's servant, contradicted by a certain swagger in his air. He touched his hat again and held out a small printed card.

"Did you bring me a message just now?—What's this?" taking the card. "Did Mrs.—Miss—a lady—give you this for me?"

"I have been sent to give you that," answered the man, evading the point.

The card simply bore the printed address of a private hotel in a street which Edric remembered as being not very far distant and unquestionably respectable.

"Am I wanted here?" he asked, partly from a wish to make the man speak again.

"If you please, sir. Shall I get you a cab, or will you allow me to show you the way?" There was a certain foreign accent, real or

assumed in his voice. It was low and smooth, and with a melodious roll in it. Not an old man's voice. It went as ill with the venerable beard as did the brisk step with which he started off when Edric somewhat curtly told him to go on and he would follow.

A quarter of an hour's quick walking brought them, as he had expected, to a street of large handsome new houses, one of which, the newest and largest, bore on a glass pane, over the door "No. 17A," and below, "Privett's Family Hotel."

The front door stood open, leaving fully visible the brightly lighted hall and vestibule, with their smart new High Art decorations and stands of foliage plants. Supper was going on somewhere evidently, for a clatter of knives and plates and a strong smell of frying escaped out into the night air, and black figures of waiters, napkin in hand, flitted to and fro.

Edric's guide waited for him to enter first. "Straight upstairs. The first door to the right," he said, and Edric, rather wonderingly, followed the direction. He was annoyed to feel his heart beating a trifle faster than usual as he stopped before it, but he knocked boldly. The door was not fastened, and swung open as he touched it; and without further thought, he entered. The man followed close on his heels. The door closed smartly behind them, shutting them in, as it at first appeared, into total darkness.

The dazzle of the gas outside had blinded him at first, or else something moved away from between him and the lamp, which he now saw was burning on a table with a strong light half-shaded so as to throw the room in darkness, except where a tall young fellow in a light overcoat—hat in hand—stood gazing full at Edric with a bewildered, rather aggressive air. He was in evening dress, Edric noticed, and wore—— It was himself, he discovered, reflected in a long mirror on the far side of the room, and the tall black shadow at his right hand was Euphrosyne, gazing at him with gleaming eyes out of the darkness.

"I knew you wouldn't fail me," was all her greeting.

"Well yes, I've come," he admitted, somewhat disconcerted. "It was in the bargain, you know. An odd sort of summons, but I suppose you had your own reasons for preferring it to a postcard or telegram." Her velvet-dark eyes studied him as he spoke, as if reading his mood. Something in this silent scrutiny irritated him, for he ended sharply: "And being here, what do you want from me?"

"Justification." The word fell gravely and impressively from her lips. She stood erect, her clasped hands lightly crossed, her head thrown back. She was younger than he had thought, shapely and lithe of figure, and her face was alight with suppressed excitement. Anyone might have passed her without notice at the first glance—not one man in ten after the second.

Edric looked at her frowningly, wondering at himself no less than at her. All the way there he had been divided between a devout hope that his obligation might resolve itself after all into a question of money

and a misgiving concerning his balance at Cox's; now he felt with quick apprehension, that so simple a method of discharging it might not be permitted him. She was not a woman to whom he could offer money, he felt, and she hardly looked either as if she needed it.

"Will you tell me more plainly what you require of me," he said, his voice sounding hard and ungracious in his own ears.

"I have called you here as my witness."

Still uncomprehending, he only bowed and looked mistrustfully around him. His eyes had grown accustomed to the want of light, and he made out that they were in a small room ending in a window or curtained recess of some sort, before which stood a Japanese screen.

He had faced it instinctively at first, and when compelled to turn and address Euphrosyne had kept his eyes fixed on the reflection in the glass. The man stood between them leaning on the table, his fat white hands, with their big gold rings, showing in the light, his face in shadow. He looked attentively from one to the other as they spoke.

"What is it all about? What do you want me to say?"

"To answer a few questions on the honour of an English gentleman. Where did you first meet me?"

"Charing Cross Station, Monday week, three p.m.," was the prompt reply.

"Where did we part?"

"At St. Fridolin's Vicarage between half-past five and six of the same day."

"You would rather not mention our errand there?"

"I distinctly refuse to discuss it."

"Do you know a Mr. Monk—Alwyn Monk?"

"I've seen him once or twice in my life—if you mean the man in our regiment."

"He was not with us?"

Edric burst into a laugh. "Hardly. He's in South Africa, with the other battalion."

"You are sure?"

"As sure as I can be of anything in this world. That is, I heard a man at mess last night saying he had got a letter from him. That's all I know."

Euphrosyne turned haughtily to the man, who had nodded attentively once or twice. "You hear? Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly, Madame." He bowed twice; respectfully to her, in a somewhat off-hand fashion to Edric, and vanished softly and suddenly.

Still holding Edric with her eyes, Euphrosyne sank into a chair, heaving a short sigh of relief, her soft dusky fingers interlaced on her knee. "I was in a sore strait," she sighed. "It came to me as an inspiration—the thought of you."

Edric felt obstinately resolved against any show of interest or

curiosity. "Couldn't the stars have helped you?" he asked, indifferently.

She answered with grave patience. "They never fail, if we have faith and strength to trust and follow blindly as they lead, or wisdom to be sure of ever reading them aright. How else could I have trusted that your pledge would find you, or that you would obey the call?"

"I am glad to have been of use—though I don't in the least understand how. Can I do anything further?" He began to think the interview had lasted long enough.

"Tell me about Mr. Monk. Every trifle is of service. You need say nothing to compromise yourself or him. What sort of man is he?"

"How can I tell? I only saw him once at the depôt, and again—at the Derby, I think it was."

"Had you no note or letter in his handwriting?"

"Not one. Stop, though; I believe I had! What *was* it about? Oh, I know! He sent me the address of a man who sold some uncommonly good boot varnish. *That's* not likely to be of much use, even if I could lay hands on it."

"Try! Try—think again—Monk, Alwyn Monk. Have you not heard the name lately?"

She had risen, and was pacing the room impatiently. Now she stopped, leaning against the Japanese screen.

"Tell me anything! Everything you can think of."

Edric sat down at last, leaned his head on his hand and thought hard. "I *did* hear something, too, the other night at mess. What *was* it?"—desperately ransacking his memory. "Somebody had a letter—theatricals, was it? He's very good at theatricals—no, that's another man. The adjutancy! That's it! He's going in for the adjutancy. I could let you know if he gets it."

She did not answer for a short space, during which he beat his brains for any connection, possible or impossible, that she could have with his affairs or he with Monk's. Then she stepped forward again, her eyes eager and excited, her lips compressed. "You will give me a line to him. What I shall dictate—nothing that will harm you," and she took up a pen and placed it in his hand with an urgent gesture. "Listen. It will do you no harm to say this to him. 'As Madame Euphrosyne Girard, of Martinique, has had the opportunity of doing me some slight service, I wish to commend her to your kind notice for such help or advice as she shall need.'"

"I can't write that!" protested Edric. "Nobody ever wrote a letter of introduction in that fashion. Besides, it wouldn't answer. Nobody would believe I wrote it." He was making idle, impatient marks on the blotting-pad as he spoke, and now looked up, not round to where she stood behind him, but at her reflection in the

looking-glass. It gave him an odd, uncanny sensation to see her dark figure leaning over him as he sat, and he moved impatiently. She seemed to divine his feeling, for she changed her position and stood beside him.

"What does it matter?" she urged. "I may never give it. It is my foolish, superstitious fancy. It is the sum total of what I ask from you. If you refuse, you leave the account between us still unsettled."

There was a threat in those last words, and so Edric understood, but still protested. "I can't put my name to a thing like that."

"Who asked for your name? You need not sign it."

"Oh, very well; in that case you shall have it word for word. Say it again please."

She repeated the formula slowly, and he wrote it down carefully, making a rapid resolution to send a line of explanation to Monk by the next Cape mail, in case of its ever being produced. He wrote slowly and deliberately so as to give himself time to think, Euphrosyne standing patiently beside him, motionless as a statue, though once or twice he fancied he heard her move softly away, and looked up suddenly at the glass in which, however, he could only make out the strong reflection of his own face against a background of shadowy blackness. He carefully brought the last words of his note to the bottom of the paper, ending in the right-hand corner so as to leave no space for the possible insertion of a signature.

"There. I don't see what good it can do you. I'm sure I should have been glad to help you in any sensible fashion. Do you really mean you want nothing more from me?"

"Nothing. You are free to go; to forget that you have ever met me. To pass me as a stranger from henceforth. Only remember this; that your fortune and mine are still as one. What strikes at you strikes at me. As your prosperity so is mine, whether together or half a world apart."

She was speaking in earnest, so Edric seemed to remember afterwards, and he listened to her with interest and without the shudder of dislike that came over him again and again, of distrust and repugnance mixed with an odd fascination.

He even held out his hand in his delight at getting off so easily. "Good-bye. Then for my sake as well as yours I wish you good luck in your errand, whatever it may be."

Euphrosyne's fingers clasped his coldly, then gave a convulsive twitch and tightened to a grasp of steel.

"Stay!" cried an imperative voice, a woman's; and with a crash the screen fell. "He must not go—not yet!"

Quick as thought Euphrosyne's left hand extinguished the lamp, and Edric, blinded and stumbling, found himself at the door, which

opened suddenly. He stepped out mechanically and it shut smartly behind him, and the click of the lock as the key turned struck on his ear.

He stood baffled and confused, wondering what he should do next, while within the door he could catch a confused murmur of voices in angry reproach, sobs and broken speech, ending in one long pitiful wail of anguish followed by silence.

Euphrosyne had wanted him to go. Very well then, that was just a conclusive reason for his staying; till some explanation of all these mysterious doings should be given him.

So down on the landing window-seat he sat, and people came and people went, and waiters gazed with polite enquiry, and the great clock in the hall struck midnight. Then the door opened and Euphrosyne, cloaked and veiled, stepped forth.

At the sight of Edric she started; her velvet-black eyes glinted with sparks of anger and her lips quivered.

"You here still?" she hissed in a wrathful whisper. "What are you waiting for?"

"You know quite well. Who was that lady I saw in there just now? What are you and she about? Do you mean to tell me, or am I to apply to a detective and find out myself?"

"I have nothing to tell you! It is not *my* secret," she answered, constraining her voice to calmness.

"Then I shall see for myself," and he pushed past her and into the room. She checked herself in a protest and let him go, her eyes sparkling with a malicious triumph.

The room was very still and the relighted lamp burning low. In the circle of its radiance lay a slumbering figure, half covered by a rich satin mantle. A thin white lady's hand loaded with shining gems rested on the arm of the couch, her face was half buried in the cushion, half concealed by a veil of heavy black lace. Edric advanced softly, doubtful and wondering, and stood for a silent moment by the couch side. She was breathing regularly but heavily, and when he ventured to extend his hand and lay it on hers, she did not stir. Gently and respectfully he lifted the veil and looked for an instant on the worn, high-bred features it concealed and the mass of snowy disordered hair, then retreated noiselessly to the door.

"I shall know her again," he said meaningly to Euphrosyne, provoked by the insolent smile that hovered on her lips. "I shall find out all about her, and about you too, you may depend upon it."

"Best let it rest here," she answered, earnestly. "There is no harm done—as yet."

"I shall act as I choose. I am not quite sure how, but I am clear that you have been making use of me for no good purpose, just as you have been using Monk's name as a blind."

He spoke in exasperation and without pausing to consider whether his remarks were altogether judicious. He was unprepared for their effect.

Euphrosyne flung her head back like a serpent going to strike. Her eyes narrowed to two gleaming slits, her lips drew themselves viciously in to one thin livid line, her whole form seemed trembling with wrath and malicious intent.

"If you dare!" she hissed softly, then rising suddenly erect she darted her head forward and breathed into his ear. "Your only chance now is silence. Take warning. Every question you ask, every word you repeat, is another spadeful dug of your own grave!"

She turned and vanished within the room and Edric slowly departed, pondering many things.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. MARGETTS BRINGS HER MONEY'S WORTH.

An American letter dated from Petropolis lay on the Vicar's table. Its non-appearance had caused him much wonder at first, many weeks ago, then had almost become a relief. He decided that the trail which Arbuthnot Corbett had started to follow so confidently had disappeared on the other side of the Atlantic; that Corbett had become absorbed in some more exciting pursuit; or—what was really the case—had fallen into the doctor's hand once more.

Lady Valeria had also kept silence. He had sent her the letter as he intended, but had received no acknowledgment, and had attempted to see her in vain. He could not be expected to know that on the occasion of his first unsuccessful call, Mr. Meynell, espying his card, had promptly made away with it, with a hint to the butler which that discreet functionary was not slow to take. On his last visit he was told that the family were out of town, gone into the country for Christmas, not expected back before Easter.

There he had perforce to let the matter rest. After all, he had lived long enough amongst his fellow creatures to discover that it is not given to every looker-on to see the end of all the games that are played around him, and that a beginning, middle and end are by no means the rule in every life drama—rather the exception. He himself had lived to see tragedy end in broad farce, comedy of intrigue fall flat with an inappropriate moral, mysteries burst like pricked balls and disappear in empty air. This might be one of these last, he thought, and was, he tried to persuade himself, well content that it should prove so. But now the letter had come.

"My dear Stannard, — Later on you shall hear what has detained me on my way. Let me begin here by saying that I have just come from seeing all that Petropolis now holds of the Magrath

family. In the smart new cemetery stands a smart new cross, begging you of your charity to 'Pray for the souls of'—

BRIDGET MARY, WIFE OF STEPHEN MAGRATH.
DIED 12 JAN. 1879. AGED 79.
ALSO OF STEPHEN MAGRATH.
DIED OCTOBER 24TH, 1881.
AND HIS DAUGHTERS
BRIDGET MARY MAGRATH AND NORAH HARTMANN,
WHO BOTH DIED OF FEVER, OCT. 27TH, 1881.

Squeezed in last 'Stephen Magrath, junior,' just over the large R. I. P. at the bottom; with neither age nor date.

"This last is your man without doubt. He died some time before his father, killed in an explosion on the railroad here with a trainful of others. His name was put on the cross by a kindly after-thought of some of his neighbours.

"In the town I can gather very little about the family. They were decent folks, and everybody had a good word for them. Last fall there had been an outbreak of fever there, brought into the place by some tramps whom the Magraths had given shelter to, and all in the house were stricken down within a few days. Norah's husband, Hartmann, and the children recovered, also the eldest daughter, Katty, to whom I was referred for further details. She is a wonderful, magnificently hideous old witch of unknown age, perhaps sixty, but thanks to drink, fever and hard work not looking a day less than a hundred. She goes about doing odd jobs for the neighbours, who speak of her as 'crazed since the troubles,' but when trated like a lady, to a friendly pipe and glass, can speak, and to the purpose, I have ascertained. Dates are perhaps beyond her, but the following facts were given readily enough.

"1st. Stephen was undoubtably Irish born. She, the eldest, 'had the mindin'' of him, the youngest, on the voyage out. Recollection a blank as to his birth or their previous life in Ireland.

"2nd. He had been for many years on the worst of terms with her as well as the rest of his family. He paid them occasional visits, but his occupation or means of existence were alike unknown.

"3rd. Was reported to be married. Wife's name, or place of residence unknown.

"4th. Age, as nearly as might be guessed, about forty.

"5th. Resembled his sister in personal appearance. A hawk-featured, blue-eyed, black-haired type, I should say.

"This is the entire sum of the fragments of information extracted at considerable expenditure of time and baccy from Miss Magrath. There are two members of the family still unaccounted for—Terence and Bartholomew—American born brothers, who are vaguely spoken of as having 'gone West' some years ago; present address unattainable.

"The editor of the Petropolis *Meteor* has been kind enough to

obtain for me the enclosed report of the accident to the train, with the names of the sufferers, from the papers of the day, also the obituary notice of the Magrath family. I enclose both. Your man is killed and buried to all certainty, and I presume my mission here accomplished. Is that enough?"

The Vicar answered the question by a long breath of relief. This news must go, and at once, to Lady Valeria, but how, and where was he to find her? The question was answered, as questions sometimes are, from a totally unexpected quarter, ten minutes later, when the Curate entered.

"Martha Margetts, sir, has entrusted me with her respectful dooty, and considers a personal interview, if not a liberty, as preferable to letter-writing, there being no Board Schools in her time making the girls that uppish that not a kitchen-maid as is fit to be trusted with so much as peeling a potato," repeated de Cressy, with perfect solemnity.

"Martha—who?" queried the Vicar, amused but unenlightened.

"A highly respectable elderly person whom I found ringing at the Vicarage door last night when you were out, and in whom, I am proud to say, I inspired sufficient confidence to be entrusted with her message. The postscript seemed the most important part. 'And be sure you let him know, sir, that Martha Margetts has got his money's worth fair and honest, or not a foot would she stir if it was ever so.'"

"I know now. It's all right. Thank you. Did she fix a time?"

"Monday evening, 'the family being engaged out.'"

"Monday the fifth? Very good."

De Cressy looked a trifle disappointed that no further explanation was forthcoming, but was quick to observe that the subject was not a welcome one and dropped it.

The remembrance of the ally he had secured on the impulse of the moment was by no means a grateful one to the Vicar. However, good Mrs. Margetts had fulfilled her part of the contract, and he could end the business by paying her off with thanks, and in this belief he awaited her appearance on the evening of the appointed day.

Punctual to the stroke of seven Mrs. Margetts' black silk gown rustled up the Vicarage steps and into the study.

She dropped hot and beaming into the chair he offered her with "Well, sir, here I am, you see, but it is a way, it is!" and took a good look about her.

"I suppose you have brought me Madame Euphrosyne's address," he began, coming to the point at once, as he seated himself at his desk and took pen in hand.

Mrs. Margetts seemed to detect a want of courtesy in this abruptness, for she drew herself up with a slightly affronted air. "Oh, yes, sir, I have the address, sir; yes, I have *the address*," with a disparaging inflection that plainly implied, "and much good may it do you."

"So I understood by your message. I am much obliged. It is—" holding his pen suspended.

"Mrs. E. Girard, 231, Copthall Street, Pimlico," pronounced slowly and carefully, in a severely neutral tone, with eyes fixed on a point of the wall just above his head.

"Thank you," with a sigh of relief. "You are sure that will find her?"

"If so be that you *wish* to correspond with her, I should say it would," with the same uncalled-for emphasis.

"Then I think you will find that correct, and I am extremely obliged to you," handing a folded paper. Mrs. Margetts brought her eyes down for a space and lifted them up again.

"I have no wish to deceive you, sir, but I *do* assure you, I couldn't bring myself to rob you of it," more stiffly than before.

"Why? It's honestly earned, isn't it?" he asked, sharply.

She dropped her eyes to his face again with sphinx-like imperturbability. "Asking your pardon, sir, in sending word as I believed I had got your money's worth, I did *not* refer to the address."

The Vicar waited patiently for further utterance, but the Oracle was silent. It was evident that Mrs. Margetts did not mean to be disposed of with the scant ceremony he contemplated. She had her story to tell, but it was clear that she must be allowed to tell it in her own way.

"Any information you can give me without bringing in your mistress's name ——"

"That's as much as to say I have lost my time coming here at all, sir. How to tell you without bringing in my lady's name I know no more than the dead; but indeed, sir, it's but right that somebody should be made aware of what's going on. If not you, then some other 'discreet and worthy minister,' as Scripture says. But as to making observations unbefitting my place—*far* be it from me, sir, *that* you may rely!"

Mr. Stannard reflected.

"You decline to take this for the address. Why?"

"Because it's not worth a bad halfpenny," was the prompt reply. "And with your leave I'll tell you how I came to find that same. Not again did that young person cross the doorstep before we was all carried off at a day's notice to Rivington, a fine place, there's no denying—but at this time of year as dismal as a jail—along of my lady's coming here so persistent, as you must have been aware, sir."

"Because of—your lady—?" Mr. Stannard groped confusedly amongst the scattered clauses of the statement.

"Yes, sir. So it was. St. Fridolin's, by your leave, is not the thing to be encouraged by a family brought up as ours has been. Mr. Oliver he felt it, he did—and made remarks about Ritualists and Romanists in disguise, that I should not think it civil to repeat; and never did he rest till he got her away to Surrey. She went quiet enough for such a masterful lady as she was. But Miss Harris, her ladyship's maid, she

said, 'If Mr. Stannard means to write or call, I do wish he'd be quick, for my lady is that wearing with her fretting and fretting ——'"

"Stop! How could you know anything of the sort?" asked the Vicar, in ignorance of that mysterious law that ordains that nothing shall be concealed in the drawing-room without being made manifest forthwith in the servants' hall.

"Easy to see, sir. Else why should a lady never leave the house, no, not for ten minutes, without giving particular orders that if you called you was on no account to be let go away before she came back? And, says she, 'Miss Harris, the postbag must be brought to me immediate,' or she would send to meet the postman at the office. No, sir, it was you and none other that my lady wore herself out expecting and expecting, and you know best with what reason."

"With none at all. There has been some great mistake."

"Then, perhaps, sir, it was *not* you that sent a long thin letter one day?"

"No. And I really must object ——"

"Of course, sir. Far be it from me to open my lips again. Only when Miss Harris, she came down into my kitchen in a dreadful way: 'Oh, Mrs. Margetts, like a good soul come! She's dead or dying!' When we got up to my lady's room, there she was in a dead faint sure enough, but not dying nor going to, and we brought her round easy. Of course, as a friend, I asked Miss Harris afterwards what had been happening to put her out. Nothing that she knows of, except that ten minutes before she had taken up the letters, and had noticed particular that one envelope with the postmark E.C.—but where that had gone she couldn't say—nor what was in it. Not even the envelope could we find about after."

"I really must decline to listen to this."

"Just as you please, sir," assented Mrs. Margetts, with alacrity. "Not another word, sir, not even to say that while still prostrate, my lady got her writing desk and sent Harris off to catch the next post with a note. 'Mad. E. Girard,' and the rest I read all of a squinny. Then says I: 'If E. Girard doesn't spell Madame Euphrosyne, my name isn't Martha Margetts."

"Thank you. That is quite sufficient for me."

"Asking your pardon, sir, you may have observed to yourself that Pimlico is *not* E.C. And for my own satisfaction I must observe that it was the next of them long, thin, lavender-coloured letters that had a Pimlico postmark—must have been written on the spot in answer to my lady's, and put her into that state of mind, nothing but coming up to town at once would content her. Mrs. Oliver were put out, there's no denying. There was to be a Twelfth Night party at Rivington for her children, so she couldn't leave, nor her husband; and yet they couldn't bear to let my lady out of their sight. I scorn to repeat things as is no affair of mine, but I give you my solemn word, that when the carriage was overturned in the snow, and my

poor lady carried home insensible, 'Providential' was the observation I heard on Mrs. Oliver's lips, let her deny it if she can."

"Was it serious?"

"Serious, sober earnest, sir. Oh, you mean the accident. It was a bad business, shock and internal injuries the doctor said, but it was the being stopped in having her way that was really doing my lady harm. There she lay, week after week—though she scorned to complain—yet as Miss Harris says, just dying of impatience. She'll never be the same woman again, sir. Poor Mr. Oliver! It makes my heart ache for him, it does."

"I don't want to hear anything about Mr. Oliver. If you have nothing more to tell——"

"About Madame Euphrosyne? I've just come to that, sir. Directly we got home a note was sent as before, and I just put on my bonnet and went to take a look at Copthall Street. No. 231 was a little shop, name of Wildmore, with gloves, and braces, and scents and fancy French sweets in the window, and the most impudent young hussy as ever I see behind the counter, with a satin gown and her fringe in her eyes. Two young gentlemen were buying sweetstuff, and her carryings on *were*, I do assure you. My lady, as haughty as you please, was trying to make a chocolate drop jump into her mouth when she slapped her hand. "Is Madame Euphrosyne here?" I says. They were all that busy slapping their fingers and jumping their chocolates that I got no answer, so down I sat. "Now my good woman, what do you want?" says the creature at last, with her mouth full. 'I want Madam Girard or Euphrosyne, and here I shall stop till I see her.' 'Oh, do, by all means. If she isn't here by Saturday, she'll be sure to look in early next week. Don't hurry yourself,' and they all laughed as if she had made a most uncommon joke. I gave a rap with my umbrella, just so. 'Very well, my good girl; if she hasn't got a letter posted at three this afternoon, you'll laugh at the wrong side of your mouth.' She looked quite respectful all of a sudden. 'She has got all of them safe enough. She sent for it half an hour ago. She never comes herself. You'll get no good by waiting.' I was of that young person's opinion, so came away direct."

"You are a born detective, Mrs. Margetts. I am sure you have more than earned your money already! I shall be obliged by your accepting it."

"Well, really, as you do make a point of it," and Mrs. Margetts pocketed the coins and her scruples simultaneously. "And now, sir, you may require nothing farther, but there's a point or two——"

"Not a word more about Lady Valeria, I beg," and the Vicar rose.

"Certainly not, sir; but you must have noticed on a Sunday now, how her ladyship never comes near you."

"No more, I request," opening the door.

"And when it comes to having words with Mr. Oliver, and threatening to make him know his place——"

"Good evening."

"And saying, when Miss Harris, at her wits' end, brings your name in, 'No, she could do without you now,' laughing in her haughty way; and when a lady at my lady's time of life takes to quarrelling with her nearest, and going out unknownst to everybody, and making appointments on the sly ——" Mrs. Margetts' voice was raised to indignation pitch, and her stops were nowhere. "And spending her nights out of bed walking backwards and forwards, and writing letter after letter and tearing them up in tiny bits and burning them with a match, and sitting hour after hour alone with—Miss Harris will take her oath of it—a portrait, a *young man's* portrait on the table before her. If I may die for saying so, I'll say it!" and she caught frantically at the door handle in a last effort. "It means my lady is going to be married, and you know best, sir, whether it is worth your while to hear that."

"I am sincerely rejoiced to hear it," was Mr. Stannard's emphatic response; one so entirely unexpected by the good woman, that, after standing confounded for a second, she turned with a bounce and departed speechless.

He looked at his watch. There would not be time to see Lady Valeria before evensong, at which he was obliged to take Mr. de Cressy's usual place this evening; yet he thought it might not be too late afterwards, considering the worth of the tidings he had to bring. Very grievous news it would be to her he knew, but the certainty would be less agonising than the cruel suspense she had been enduring.

It was not as if the loss left her desolate. The miserable sense of alienation from her first-born son would be spared her, and the jarring relationships between her and her other children be more readily adjusted. She might learn to look more tenderly on her other son when he no longer seemed an interloper to oust his brother from his rightful place.

The good of the tidings far outweighed the evil, if he might but be granted wisdom to make her see it.

CHAPTER XV.

WATCHING FOR LADY VALERIA.

Mr. Stannard felt less confident when later on he laid his hand on the knocker of the door in Seagrave Place. Despite his utmost speed, nine had long since struck, and he felt that his visit at this hour might alarm an invalid, as Lady Valeria now was. It would also attract attention and question if any of the family should be there. But he must risk it. He dare not delay longer, even though the servant who answered his summons assured him that there was no chance of his being able to see his mistress that evening.

"I will wait till you have told her I am here. You will find that she is expecting me, I think." And the perplexed domestic, after a glance at the name, gave internal thanks that "Mr. Oliver was there and might have it out with him himself," and showed the visitor into the unlighted library, where he left him with a hastily kindled pair of candles to await the result of Mr. Oliver's decision.

That came at least promptly. Eustace had not waited many minutes before he was summoned to follow the butler up the gorgeous imitation marble staircase to the drawing-room. It was a house of exploded splendours. A typical house showing what once upon a time money could do, money alone, unassisted by art or culture. Everything down to the very door-mat was gorgeous and gorgeous only; or had been so once upon a time. Age and use had done their kindly work in toning down over-brilliant be-gildings, mellowing startling tints and casting a beneficent mantle of wear and dust over the chilly classicalities of frieze and marble groups that had once glared painful in their snowy whiteness against their surroundings of Axminster and veneer. Otherwise all remained very much as when it came first from the hands of the leading upholsterer of the day, when Oliver Meynell, the father, gave him carte-blanche to render the house fit for the reception of his beautiful young Irish bride, Lady Valeria de Cressy.

Mr. Stannard was ushered into a room ablaze with light and dazzling with crystal and gold, reflected to and fro in vast sheets of looking-glass. The furniture was white and gold, Louis Quatorze scrolls and twirls and wreathings of gilded foliage. The hangings were yellow satin and white brocade. The candles burned in great twinkling crystal chandeliers. On every side was buhl, ormolu, alabaster, looking-glass, gilding, satin and lace.

In the very core and centre of the splendour, yet not of it, sat a lady knitting. Not Lady Valeria. A tall spare lady, with smooth plaited hair, dove-like eyes, and a delicate, pinched mouth; richly clad in dove-colour silk, of ostentatious simplicity of make. Near her, leaning on the great buhl table, was an elderly young man, prematurely bald, with keen grey eyes and an intelligent face, the last person whom Eustace could have wished to find there, Mr. Oliver Meynell in person.

He came forward ceremoniously with a grave bow.

"Mr. Stannard of St. Fridolin's, I presume? Let me introduce you to Mrs. Meynell."

He spoke with a studied accent of neutrality that committed him to nothing beyond the ordinary duties of hospitality, but a distinct spasm of horror crossed Mrs. Meynell's face at the mention of the church, and her greeting could not have been more distant had he been the Great Dragon in person.

"I have called at an unusual hour," Eustace hastened to explain;

"but my days are much occupied just now, and my business with Lady Valeria being urgent, I trusted that she would excuse it."

"You had an appointment with my mother?"

"Not exactly. She had reason to expect me sooner than this. I have not seen or heard from Lady Valeria for many months," he added, and then was vexed with himself for doing so. Mr. and Mrs. Meynell exchanged glances, but neither made any comment, and an awkward pause followed. Mr. Meynell gave one or two little premonitory coughs as if about to make some observation, but checked himself again, and Mrs. Meynell knitted in demure silence. Mr. Stannard had said his say, so he volunteered no contribution to the conversation.

"Have I any chance of seeing your mother to-night?" he enquired at last, when the silence grew too significant.

Mr. Meynell cleared his throat desperately once more.

"I—I—can't say, really. To be frank with you, Mr. Stannard, I should be much relieved if you could give me your message and be content without seeing her. Would that be quite out of the question?"

"Quite so. I have an account to render to Lady Valeria and to her alone."

"She is very much changed of late. Her illness has shaken and aged her. I wish to spare her any agitation."

"Why do you assume that my business will agitate or distress her?"

"I really cannot say—the unusual hour—your urgency," hesitated the banker.

"As I said before, I could not choose my time. If this is an unfortunate one for any reason, I will not persist. Will you only kindly let Lady Valeria know that I am here, and ask her to appoint another."

Silence, almost consternated silence, fell again on the husband and wife at this suggestion. Mr. Meynell frowned and fidgetted with a paper-knife he held, and ended by looking appealingly at his wife. "My mother distinctly refused to see anyone about an hour ago, but, perhaps, if you would try again, Constance ——"

"Certainly," she assented, rising with lady-like readiness. "Will you please give me the message exactly as I am to take it. Shall I say Mr. Stannard is here, and ask dear mamma to appoint a time for seeing him another day, if she does not feel equal to doing so to-night? Very good."

Mr. Meynell's eyes followed her retreating figure doubtfully. Her departure seemed nevertheless to relieve him of some constraint, and he turned to the Vicar with a decided air.

"I am going to speak plainly to you, Mr. Stannard. I don't particularly care for my mother to become one of your followers.

I know she went regularly to St. Fridolin's last year, and, I suppose, your errand here to-night has somewhat of a purpose to draw her there again. It is my duty to stand between her and what I believe to be pernicious, and the religious atmosphere of your church is to my mind distinctly unwholesome. I can understand that a convert like Lady Valeria Meynell must be an object of——"

"Stop there, if you please," spoke Eustace, flushing hotly. "Am I here to defend my opinions or to vindicate my conduct as a gentleman. Let us take your grounds of offence separately."

"I meant no offence," answered Meynell, awkwardly, not to say sulkily.

"I am very glad to hear that at least."

"But you mean that I am offensive all the same. I cannot help it, Mr. Stannard. These are not pleasant words for me to speak. I am fulfilling a duty laid upon me, to shield a weaker vessel from too severe temptation. You shall see my mother as you desire, and I will trust to your sense of honour—poor worldly substitute for Christian principle—not to tamper ——"

Eustace began to feel as if the Christian virtue of patience was at least strained to its utmost limits. "My business is with Lady Valeria alone, I tell you. It is a charge of her bestowing, and from which I shall gladly see myself relieved. To-night's interview may—I devoutly hope will—prove our final one."

Mrs. Meynell's return stopped his words short. She breathed quickly and looked flurried beneath her sedate composure. "You cannot see Lady Valeria to-night, Mr. Stannard. And I can make no appointment for you either. I have not seen her. She has gone out."

"Gone out!" shouted Meynell. "Constance! What are you talking about?"

"My *dear* Oliver," protested his wife. "How *should* I know your mother's engagements? She can come and go in her own house as she pleases, I suppose. She must have gone out directly after sending that message to us." And Mrs. Meynell gave a look at her husband as if to remind him of Eustace's presence. But Meynell's anxiety was beyond repression.

"Gone out. At this time. In her state of health. Gone out secretly, without a maid to attend her?"

"We don't know that Harris is not with her. Of course I could not set the servants gossipping by making a commotion and asking questions. We must wait and see." And the dove-coloured lady smoothed her ruffled plumage, and resuming her seat, picked up the knitting.

Meynell was white to the very lips. "Where *can* she be?" he spoke under his breath, and his eyes wandered distressedly from the composed figure of his wife to the Vicar's face. "Can you give a guess?" he asked, almost imploringly.

Eustace shook his head. "Unless she has gone to seek me at St. Fridolin's. I tell you candidly that is most likely."

Mrs. Meynell looked up with strong disapproval. Hush, *please*," and the door opened to admit the butler with the great silver tea-tray. Oliver turned away impatiently, but his wife managed to maintain a discreet, unruffled demeanour. "Should you prefer coffee, Mr. Stannard? No? Cream and sugar?" The cream was unsteadily poured, and the sugar-tongs rattled a little, but she managed to go through the proper formalities and to sip her own cup of tea, though Eustace set his down untasted. The hidden terror that possessed Meynell was infecting both.

He walked the great glittering chamber from end to end, stopping to listen to every chance noise in the street outside, his unquiet figure reflected and multiplied in all the mirrors around. Eustace had thought he had better go, but received a hastily whispered "No. Stay. Let her find you here." That had decided the question. Mrs. Meynell had resumed her knitting, but the needles flickered fitfully and the silk ran with a jerk and twist now and then. A great gilt clock on the mantelpiece ticked the minutes away noisily. It was a grand allegorical composition, with a Greek hero in a triumphal chariot attended by winged Loves and unclad nymphs bearing garlands. One fat Cupid seemed to catch Mr. Stannard's eye every time he consulted it, and to be pointing sardonically with his golden dart at the small space the minute-hand had covered since last he looked. Now and then Mrs. Meynell hazarded a small remark to which Eustace replied, somewhat, it must be confessed, at random.

"It is dear mamma's delicate state of health that makes it so extraordinary she should have gone out without consulting us. Oliver and I heard that the Brants—my sister-in-law and her husband, who are living here, you know—we heard that *they* were to be out and so came over to spend the evening with mamma and prevent her from feeling dull. She did not expect us, and might very easily have made some other engagement."

"I—I beg your pardon." Eustace was on the alert to catch some sounds of coming wheels. "The Brants?"

"Lord Charles Brant married Mr. Meynell's only sister. They have no town house this year, and so during the session ——"

"There's Brant," Meynell exclaimed. "What shall I say? He always is sure to ask questions."

"Go down and send him off at once to Mrs. Damien's to join Mabel. She left word that he was to be sure to do so if he returned in anything like reasonable time," Mrs. Meynell replied promptly; and Oliver departed to do her bidding. "You must be astonished at Oliver's anxiety," she went on. "He is the most devoted of sons. *I* think it overstrained, especially with a person like Lady Valeria, who has taken her own way so completely all her life. She will be only annoyed when she finds us waiting here for her."

Meynell returned, and the endless evening dragged on for half-an-hour longer. Even the fat cupid could not disguise the fact that it was nearing eleven when Eustace made another attempt to depart. This time Meynell looked really and unfeignedly alarmed when his attention was called to the hour.

"Wait, please wait a few minutes more," he urged.

The butler entered to remove the tea-tray, advanced to Oliver, and asked a discreetly low-voiced question.

"Certainly not," was the reply. "My mother is too unwell to come downstairs again. You may all go to bed without waiting for family prayers to-night. Mrs. Meynell and I will stay here till Lord and Lady Charles return."

The butler's face expressed satisfaction with the arrangement, and he retired finally, leaving the three to their watch. "They don't know she is not in the house," Mr. Meynell said, with a meaning look at his wife. "If I only knew what to do ——"

The door burst violently open, and a precise young person, fluttered out of all propriety, rushed into the room.

"My lady! Oh, sir, my lady! Where for pity's sake is she? I just looked into the room, and it was empty—and her so ill! Oh dear! Oh dear! Is she gone off her head and wandered away somewhere ——"

Meynell turned sharply. "Then you were not with her?"—but his wife took the word from him.

"No, Oliver, Harris was *not* with her mistress. Harris has been out on her own concern, she best knows where. If you had not chosen to go out, Harris, without obtaining permission, your mistress might have been spared some inconvenience."

"My lady said she shouldn't want me again! She really and truly did," protested the remorseful Harris. "And she being ill, I didn't like to disturb her just to ask to go out to post a letter and match a bit of ribbon, and the shops being closed ——" faltered the guilty one.

"A thing which no properly behaved maid ever does in my experience," Mrs. Meynell pursued awfully. "Lady Valeria will speak to you in the morning. Meanwhile you may go to bed. I or Lady Charles will see that she has all she requires for the night."

"I'm sure I didn't stay a quarter of an hour; and Anne said if her ladyship's bell rang she would attend; and her ladyship's orders were so strict for us to keep away and leave her quiet."

"That will do. You may go." And cowering under Mrs. Meynell's severe gaze, the culprit departed.

The two men looked in each other's face uneasily. This fresh evidence of the secrecy attending Lady Valeria's errand affected both with apprehension. Only Constance, invigorated by the encounter with Harris, maintained her equanimity.

The house sank into deep, deep silence, as the clock ticked on to midnight and passed it. The candles burned lower and lower, and

began to cast giant shadows of their sconces on the floor and wall. The night seemed to grow suddenly chill, and Mrs. Meynell brought her white, fur-lined wrap from an inner room, and sat knitting with it on, a proceeding which seemed to increase the uncomfortableness and drearyness of the whole indefinitely.

"Are you sure she is not upstairs after all?" asked Oliver, with sudden alarm. "Ill—fainting—somewhere. And to be left all those hours and hours!"

They all started in affright at the suggestion. Meynell hastily got a light and led the way, first to the small second drawing-room which opened out of the one in which they were sitting. It was empty, silent and chill. Lady Valeria's rooms were one turn of the stairs higher. A bedroom in order for the night, round which Mrs. Meynell searched while the two men stood outside listening expectant. She shook her head as she emerged, and they went on to the sitting-room next to it. Harris had made up the fire lately and lighted the candles on the mantelpiece, which wavered in the forlorn fashion candles have, burning out uselessly in a deserted room. A couch stood near the fire and looked as if it had been lately occupied. On the sofa-table near it, stood a large desk and some books, and a Bible half-closed lay within reach of the couch. Oliver looked around—behind the couch and in the great chair by the window—Mrs. Meynell ran lightly up the stairs to the upper floor. It was during her absence that Meynell turned to Eustace.

"Is it *quite* impossible for you to help me? To give me any clue to the matter that so engrosses her thoughts?"

"Quite impossible," the other had replied regretfully, touched to the heart by the devouring anxiety in the banker's manner. "I wish I could make you understand how fervently I wish it were otherwise. I wish I could place the business in your hands, but I dare not."

Oliver silently arranged the sofa-cushions and rugs, and carefully made up the fire anew. He touched the books on the table. Something thick in a fold of soft paper lay between the pages of the Bible as a mark. He drew it half out, but, hearing his wife's footstep, refrained, and slipped it further in.

"Hush!" cried Constance, softly, "the Brants!" and she shut the door gently. Voices and steps on the stairs outside ascended and passed. Lady Charles declaiming about somebody's "tone," or want of it; Lord Charles sleepily acquiescing. Mr. Meynell looked out at them.

"You here still Oliver?" exclaimed his sister. "How is mamma to-night?"

"Much better, I hope," he answered, drawing back and closing the door. He had had some faint, wild hope that she might have been with her daughter after all, or that Mabel might know of her absence. Now there was nothing to be done but to return to the dreary brightness of the drawing-room and recommence the weary waiting. Mr.

Meynell impatiently lighted a taper and kindled more clusters of wax-lights. "Would you not like to go home, Constance? I can always send for Mabel when my mother returns."

"Certainly not, dear," said his wife, cheerfully, standing to her colours bravely. "It is comparatively early yet. You forget how often Charles has kept us all up later than this, waiting for his return from the House. It is nothing extraordinary. Perhaps, though, Mr. Stannard may have early services or some such doings to think of."

"Hush, what was that?" Meynell interrupted; wheels stopping, a sound of the door below opening, subdued voices in the hall, the re-closing of the door and a step on the stair—the right one at last.

Not with the weary tread of an invalid, but with a rapid, light, vigorous step Lady Valeria entered, and standing in the doorway confronted the three. She was wrapped in a long satin cloak, her head veiled in lace, which she tossed back impatiently as if for air; and, her head high, her eyes bright and her face full of a strange pre-occupation, she advanced slowly towards them. Each felt more embarrassed than she was. She did not seem to think any explanation needful, nor manifest any surprise at their presence there.

"How late you are, mamma!" said Constance, rising dutifully to meet her and holding out her cheek to be kissed. "We had no idea you were out, and have been waiting to see you all the evening. Oliver had been quite wretched at the thoughts that you were not equal to seeing us."

Lady Valeria kissed her and held out her hand to her son absently. "I am sorry that you should have distressed yourself about me," she said, in an indifferent, conventional tone. "Why did you wait? You are too ready to trouble yourself about my coming and going, Oliver," she frowned slightly; "it is quite unnecessary."

"I am very glad," he began, but she seemed to resent even his tone of relief.

"It is very good and dutiful of you I know, but now that you are satisfied, I hope you will not let me keep you here longer. Did you want me for any special reason, Mr. Stannard?"

"For a very special one, but as it is so late ——"

"I wish to see you, too. You and Constance will excuse me, I know, Oliver. Good-night, my dear."

Eustace felt unaccountably sorry for Mr. Meynell as he took his leave with a look of perplexity in his face, stopping at the door to gaze back at Eustace with a curious air of warning and appeal, as his wife made her serene transit smiling and reassured.

Lady Valeria watched them go, then loosened her veil and laid down her long mantle. She was greatly changed he saw. Her dress hung loosely on her sharp shoulders, her rings slipped about on her wasted fingers; but her whole person was transfigured for the moment by some strong intense inward ecstasy that shone in her eyes and rang in her voice and filled her with strength and joy.

Was it expectation of his news, he wondered with some dread, and began his explanations hastily. She listened in silence with more of courteous patience in her air than of interest. Her eyes rested on his face now and then, but for the most part were fixed on vacancy, and she smiled to herself once or twice. When he came to his news from Petropolis, she grew suddenly grave and attentive. "Poor old Biddy!" she sighed once, under her breath.

"And there the search has ended. Whatever interest you may have felt in that adopted son, Lady Valeria, may end here. I have executed your wishes and you have at last, and at least, found a certainty."

"Yes, found a certainty," she assented, with an inscrutable, furtive smile.

"And your hopes and fears may rest for ever."

"For ever!" she echoed again, but her smile brightened, though she drooped her head to conceal it.

He was silent from astonishment, then handed her the two letters. "Do you care to read this and see for yourself."

"Why should I?" she demanded, with a face of almost insolent triumph. "What good is that to me? If it says my son is dead, it is false!" and she tossed them from her. "Ah, forgive me! I did wrong to come to you, and you have been very good—but my heart is full, is breaking with joy! He is alive. My son, my very son, alive! I can call him to me when I will!" And she turned on Eustace a face all alight with rapture.

"You are certain?" was all he could say.

"Certain! and before many days are over not you alone but the world shall be as certain as I am. Wait, only wait till I can take him to my heart and tell him his father's name!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A COUNTERFEIT PRESENTMENT.

Mrs. Beltran was up and astir portentously early next morning. Elsie saw her red-lined cloak sweep past the window, and beckoned to her with a nod and a smile. The imperative need of sympathy, which besets most women in emotional crises, had seized her. The reaction of last night's excitement had left her restless and unhinged, full of audaciously brilliant imaginings one moment, and direst misgivings the next. But Mrs. Beltran only shook her head and passed on.

The red flower's day was done. The long crimson petals hung limp and discoloured round a shrivelled stem. The golden starry centre had shrunk to a pinch of brown dust. Elsie, sighing, laid the faded fragments tenderly in a small tortoise-shell box, one of her few treasures, to be cherished as precious relics for the rest of her life.

The shadow fell across the window again while she was thus

busied, and Mrs. Beltran entered without waiting to be summoned. She had been walking briskly, and that, or some secret excitement, had brought a dusky glow to her cheek and a light to her eyes. She held her head erect, and there was an air of suppressed exultation in her whole bearing that Elsie might have noticed at any other time. She composed herself, however, in her old languid fashion in her usual seat near Elsie's couch, and, taking the girl's hand caressingly in hers, waited for her confidences.

They were but few and meagre ones after all. Elsie could not bring herself to part with her wonderful secret at once. She played around it as it were, chattering rather at random about the delights of the past evening—the ladies' dresses, the music, the compliments paid Sampson, everybody's great kindness to her. Mrs. Beltran listened with a benignant smile.

Now and then a sharp, furtive glance shot through her narrowed eyelids at the girl's face. She seemed on the watch to catch a hint —a name. But Elsie kept her own counsel and left the most interesting part untold.

"Look at that!" spoke Mrs. Beltran, with sudden impatience. "Who is it?"

It was a cabinet photograph enclosed in an envelope with the name of a photographer of note on the outside.

Elsie looked at it respectfully and cut the string round it. "Is it your husband?" she asked, drawing forth the enclosure. Then she gave an involuntary little cry and raised her hands as if to cover her hotly blushing cheeks. It was a large tinted portrait of a young, handsome man, and the wide-open, honest, blue eyes that smiled up into hers were—Sir Geraint's?—or Mr. Edric Poynter's?

"Ah, I thought that would make you speak!" Mrs. Beltran said, with a low laugh. "So you knew it," and she nodded well-pleased.

"It's a bad photograph," spoke Elsie, decidedly, to cover her confusion. "Not a bit like their usual work. Oh, I know it quite well. My sister—poor Emmie who died—used to paint for them, and I've helped her often and often. I should say the negative had been damaged ——"

"Never mind the negative. Now look at this portrait—his father. Don't you think them alike?"

She held out her hand for the photograph, but Elsie kept fast hold of it, while she took from Mrs. Beltran's hand a shabby old miniature case. A blue velvet case with a cipher in gold on the back. Inside was a large, old-fashioned locket, with a loop for a ribbon, and a turquoise setting. The gold was coppery-pink, the turquoises faded to all shades of green and yellowish blue, and the flesh tints of the miniature had bleached to a ghastly whiteness; but enough remained to show that the portrait had been a piece of clever workmanship in its day. A likeness of a young officer of dragoons in an old-fashioned uniform, high-stocked, small-waisted, and epauletted.

"How exactly alike they are!" she exclaimed. The hair in the miniature fell in rippling locks and the moustache stuck out fiercely, in odd disconnection with the light little ringletted whiskers, while the photograph was close cropped and wore a coat of the season's cut. Yet the features and expression of the two were strikingly similar.

She looked from one to the other once or twice, turned the locket over and smiled at the dry, faded curl of light hair fastened in with a knot of seed-pearl, wondering who had worn and gazed on it and dreamed dreams over it years and years ago, before her days in this world had begun. Then she examined the case and tried to spell out the cipher. "'A' and 'J' and a 'Q,' and some little letters besides," she read.

"*I* make it 'J. A.,'" said Mrs. Beltran, with a secret smile.

Elsie returned to her study of the face. "A good face," she murmured, "a kind, brave face." She rubbed her eyes suddenly and looked at it afresh with a flash of awakened curiosity. Some bright idea and a merry one had seized her. She picked up the photograph again. "Yes, I thought I knew ——"

"Knew what?" asked Mrs. Beltran, sharply.

"Knew how you came by that photograph," and Elsie laughed roguishly. "You couldn't take me in, after helping poor Emmie so long. Why, I could do it myself."

"What do you mean?" cried Mrs. Beltran, recovering the photograph with a fierce snatch. Her face was not good to look at just then. The pent-up passion within blanched her face to the lips, and she drew back for a second out of range of Elsie's eyes.

"Is it a cheat—a trick?" she asked, almost directly, in her smooth, low tone. "It doesn't concern me, you know. I do not even know the people. I must have done wrong to show it to you. You will keep my secret?" Elsie nodded dubiously. "There is no harm in it, but you may tell him all you know when you see him again, if you like."

"When I see him again? You mean Mr. Poynter? I do not know whether I ever shall," and Elsie's voice trembled.

"That is as you choose," and Mrs. Beltran smiled mysteriously. "What was your wish? What is he to do for your sake?"

"Not for me—for Sampson—he did say for my sake ——" Elsie broke off, flooded with blushes. Her mind had travelled miles away from the photograph and its secret, whatever it might have been, Mrs. Beltran saw, and was satisfied. She turned away from Elsie and took up the dead flower in its little shrine, while Elsie faltered a few words of explanation to which she hardly appeared to listen.

"He has left you for ever, and the red flower is dead and the chance is gone," she spoke, in her soft, musical voice, in a sort of melancholy chant. "Gone, all gone for ever!" Elsie raised two eyes filled with gathering tears to her face, and her lips trembled

piteously. "Gone! But they will come again." Elsie shook her head in forlorn incredulity.

"They can come back at my call," declared Mrs. Beltran. "Past days, lost hopes, a dead flower." She rose to her full height, towering over Elsie and looking down on her with her face of dark, mysterious power. "What do you know of the gifts I hold in my hand for those who trust me? I would have given you great things long ago, had you chosen, but you turned from me to other friends."

"They have been good friends to me," protested Elsie, horribly nervous, but loyal. "What could *you* have done for me more than they do? Can you make me different from what I am? Can you make me like other girls? Give me health, strength, and nights free of pain?"

"Put your hand in mine and have faith in me," said Mrs. Beltran, solemnly. "You have asked me a simple gift. You shall have it as a token that the others which you long for shall follow it!"

(To be continued.)

A SPRING SONG.

Bud and blossom on flower and tree,
Birds in the old elm singing;
Flowery fields that are bright with dew,
Where lovers by wandering two and two
Set wedding bells a-ringing.

Arrows of light on the silver stream,
That flows through the clustered larches,
Whose emerald buds with their rosy stain
Blush to the kiss of the sun again,
Twixt the dusky brushwood arches.

Crisp fern fronds on the streamlet edge,
From the red tipped mosses peeping;
And the sweet blue bells, with their clappers of gold,
Where the fairies swung in the breeze of old,
When the round dim world was sleeping.

Come out! come out! in the willow copse,
Blackbird and thrush are singing;
For Spring is the time of love, my dear,
And down in the sunlit valley I hear
Sweet wedding bells a-ringing!

C. E. C. W.

A TRAGEDY.

DINNER was over. Emma Paul had gone out to stroll in the shady garden and wait for the evening breeze that would soon come on, and was so delightful after the heat of the day. Her father remained at the table. He was slowly sipping at his one glass of port wine, which he took in a large claret glass, when the door opened and Thomas Chandler entered.

"Oh," said Mr. Paul. "So you *are* back, are you, young man!"

"I went on to Worcester, sir," explained Tom; who though he was now made Mr. Paul's partner, could not get rid all at once of the old mode of addressing him. Managing clerks in these days, who are qualified solicitors, do not condescend to say "Sir" to their chief, no matter though he be their elder by half a life-time; but they did in the days gone by.

"When I got to Crabb Cot this morning, sir, Mr. Todhetley was on the point of starting for Worcester in the phaeton with his son and Johnny Ludlow," went on Tom. "After listening to the news I took him, he naturally wished me to go also, and I did so. He was in a fine way about it."

"But you need not have stayed at Worcester all day."

"Well, being there, I thought—after I had conferred with Corles at his office upon this other matter—I should do well to go on to Oddingley and see William Smith about that troublesome business of his; so I hired a gig and went there; and I've just got back by train, walking from Crabb," answered Tom Chandler.

"Had any dinner?"

"Oh, yes, thank you; and some tea also at Shrub Hill station, while waiting for the train: this weather makes one thirsty. No, thank you, sir," as Mr. Paul pushed the decanter towards him; "wine would only make me still more thirsty than I am."

"I never saw you looking so hot," remarked the old lawyer.

Tom laughed, and rubbed his face. The walk from Crabb was no light one: and, of course, with Miss Emma at the end of it, he had come at a steaming pace.

"Well, and what did you and Todhetley make of the matter?"

It was the day, as may readily be understood, when we had gone to Worcester to have it out at the silversmith's. Tom Chandler recounted all that passed, and repeated the description given to himself by Stephenson of the fellow who had changed the bank-note. Mr. Paul received it with an impatient and not at all orthodox word, meant for Richard MacEveril.

"But I cannot feel sure, no, nor half sure, that it was MacEveril," said Tom Chandler.

"What have your feelings got to do with it?" asked old Paul, in his crusty way. "It seems to me, the description you give would be his very picture."

"Stephenson says he had blue eyes. Now Dick's are brown."

"Eyes be sugared," retorted the lawyer. "As if any man could swear to a chance customer's eyes after seeing them for just a minute or two! It was Dick MacEveril; he caught up the letter as it lay on Hanborough's desk in the office, and decamped with it; and went off the next day to Worcester to get the note changed, as bold as though he had been Dick Turpin!"

Still Tom was not convinced. He took out the pencil he had bought, and showed it to Mr. Paul.

"Ay," said the old gentleman, "it's a pretty thing, and perhaps he may get traced by it. Do you forget, Mr. Thomas, that the young rascal absented himself all that day from the office on pretext of going to the picnic at Mrs. Cramp's, and that, as you told me, he never made his appearance at the picnic until late in the afternoon?"

"I know," assented Tom. "He said he had been to the pigeon match."

"If he said he had been to the moon, I suppose you'd believe it. Don't tell me! It was Dick MacEveril who stole the note; every attendant circumstance helps to prove it. There: we'll say no more about the matter, and you can be off to the garden if you want to; I know you are on thorns for it."

From that day the matter dropped into oblivion, and nothing was allowed to transpire connecting MacEveril with the theft. Mr. Paul enjoined silence, out of regard for his old friend the captain, on Tom Chandler and Mr. Hanborough, the only two, besides himself, who suspected Dick. Some letters arrived at Islip about this time from Paris, written by Dick: one to Captain MacEveril, another to Mr. Paul, a third to his cousin Mary. He coolly said he was gone to Paris for a few weeks with Jim Stockleigh, and they were both enjoying themselves amazingly.

So, the ball of gossip not being kept up, the mysterious loss of the letter containing the bank-note was soon forgotten. Mr. Paul was too vexed to speak of it; it seemed a slur upon his office; and he shielded Dick's good name for his uncle's sake; while Preen was silent because he did not wish the *debt* talked about.

We left Crabb Cot for Dyke Manor, carrying our wonder with us. The next singular point to us was, how the changer of the note could have been so well acquainted with the circumstances attending the buying of the brooch. Mrs. Todhetley would talk of it by the hour together, suggesting now this person and now that; but never seeming to hit upon a likely one.

July passed away, August also, and September came in. On the Thursday in the first week of the latter month, Emma Paul was to become Emma Chandler

All that while, through all those months and weeks, poor Oliver Preen had been having a bad time of it. No longer able to buoy himself up with the delusive belief that Emma's engagement to Chandler was nothing but a myth, he had to accept it, and all the torment it brought him. He had grown pale and thin; nervous also; his lips would turn white if anyone spoke to him abruptly, his hot hand trembled when in another's grasp. Jane thought he must he suffering from some inward fever; she did not know much about her brother's love for Emma, or dream that it could be so serious.

"I'm sure I wish their wedding was over and done with; Oliver might come to his proper senses then," Jane told herself. "He is very silly. *I* don't see much in Emma Paul."

September, I say, came in. It was somewhat singular that we should again be for just that one first week of it at Crabb Cot. Sir Robert Tenby had invited the Squire to take a few days' shooting with him, and included Tod in the invitation—to his wild delight. So Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley went from Dyke Manor to Crabb Cot for the week, and we accompanied them.

On the Monday morning of this eventful week—and terribly eventful it was destined to be—Mr. Paul's office had a surprise. Richard MacEveril walked into it. He was looking fresh and blooming, as if he had never heard of such a thing as running away. Mr. Hanborough gazed up at him from his desk as if he saw an apparition; Tite Batley's red face seemed illumined by sudden sunshine.

"Well, and is nobody going to welcome me back?" cried Dick, as he put out his hand, in the silence, to Mr. Hanborough.

"The truth is, we never expected to see you back; we thought you had gone for good," answered Hanborough.

Dick laughed. "The two masters in there?" he asked, giving his head a nod at the inner door.

Hearing that they were, he went in. Old Paul, in his astonishment, dropped a penful of ink upon a letter he was writing.

"Why, where do you spring from?" he cried.

"From my uncle's now, sir; got home last night. Been having a rare time of it in Paris. I suppose I may take my place at the desk again?" added Dick.

The impudence of this supposition drove all Mr. Paul's wisdom out of him. Motioning to Tom Chandler to close the doors, he avowed to Dick what he was suspected of, and accused him of taking the letter and the bank-note.

"Well I never!" exclaimed Dick, meeting the news with equanimity. "Go off with a letter of yours, sir, and a bank-note! *Steal* it, do you mean? Why, you cannot think I'd be capable of such a dirty trick, Mr. Paul. Indeed, sir, it wasn't me."

And there was something in the genuine astonishment of the

young fellow, a certain honesty in his look and tone, that told Mr. Paul his suspicion might be a mistaken one. He recounted a brief outline of the facts, Tom Chandler helping him.

"I never saw the letter or the note, sir," persisted Dick. "I remember the Wednesday afternoon quite well. When I went out to get my tea I met Fred Scott, and he persuaded me into the Bull for a game at billiards. It was half-past five before I got back here, and Mr. Hanborough blew me up. He had not been able to get out to his own tea. Batley was away that afternoon. No, no, sir, I'd not do such a thing as that."

"Where did you get the money to go away to London with, young man?" questioned old Paul, severely.

Dick laughed. "I won it," he said; "upon my word of honour, sir, I did. It was the day of the picnic, and I persisted in going straight to it the first thing—which put the office here in a rage, as it was busy. Well, in turning out of here I again met Scott. He was hastening off to the pigeon-shooting match. I went with him, intending to stay but half-an-hour. But, once there, I couldn't tear myself away. They were betting; I betted too, though I had only half-a-crown in my pocket, and I won thirty shillings; and I never got to Mrs. Cramp's till the afternoon, when it was close upon tea-time. Tom Chandler knows I didn't."

Tom Chandler nodded.

"But for winning that thirty shillings I could not have got up to London, unless somebody had lent me some," ran on Dick, who, once set going, was a rare talker. "You can ask anyone at that pigeon match, sir, whether I was not there the whole time: so it is impossible I could have been at Worcester, changing a bank-note."

The words brought to Mr. Paul a regret that he had *not* thought to ask that question of some one of the sportsmen: it would have set the matter at rest, so far as MacEveril was concerned. And the suspicion had been so apparently well grounded, as to prevent suspicion in other quarters.

Tom Chandler, standing beside Dick at Mr. Paul's table, quietly laid a pencil upon it, as if intending to write something down. Dick took it up and looked at it.

"What a pretty pencil!" he exclaimed. "Is it gold?"

It should be understood that in those past days, these ornamental pencils were rare. They may be bought by the bushel now. And Tom Chandler would have been convinced by the tone, had he still needed conviction, that Dick had not seen any pencil like it before.

"Well," struck in old Paul, a little repentant for having so surely assumed Dick's guilt, and thankful on the captain's account that it was a mistake: "if you promise to be steady at your work, young man, I suppose you may take your place at the desk again. This gentleman here is going a-roving this week," pointing the feather-end

of his pen at Tom Chandler, "for no one knows how long; so you'll have to stick to it."

"I know; I've heard," laughed Dick. "I mean to get a few minutes to dash into the church and see the wedding. Hope you'll not dismiss me for it, sir!"

"There, there; you go to your desk now, young man, and ask Mr. Hanborough what you must do first," concluded the lawyer.

It was not the only time on that same day that Thomas Chandler displayed his pencil. Finding his theory, that Dick MacEveril possessed the fellow one, to be mistaken, he at once began to take every opportunity of showing it to the world—which he had not done hitherto. Something might possibly come of it, he thought. And something did.

Calling in at Colonel Letsom's in the evening, I found Jane Preen there, and one or two more girls. The Squire and Tod had not appeared at home yet, neither had Colonel Letsom, who made one at the shooting party; we decided that Sir Robert must be keeping them to an unceremonious dinner. Presently Tom Chandler came in, to bring a note to the Colonel from Mr. Paul.

Bob Letsom proposed a round game at cards—Speculation. His sister, Fanny, objected; speculation was nothing but screaming, she said, and we couldn't sit down to cards by daylight. She proposed music; she thought great things of her singing: Bob retorted that music might be shot, and they talked at one another a bit. Finally we settled to play at "Consequences." This involves, as everyone knows, sitting round a table with pencils and pieces of writing-paper.

I sat next to Tom Chandler, Jane Preen next to me. Fanny was on the other side of Tom—but it is not necessary to relate how we all sat. Before we had well begun, Chandler put his pencil on the table, carelessly, and it rolled past me.

"Why! that is Oliver's pencil!" exclaimed Jane, picking it up.

"Which is?" quietly said Tom. "That? No; it is mine."

Jane looked at it on all sides. "It is exactly like one that Oliver has," she said. "It fell out of a drawer in his room the other day, when I was counting up his collars and handkerchiefs. He told me he brought it from Tours."

"No doubt," said Tom. "I bought mine at Worcester."

In taking the pencil from Jane, Tom's eye caught mine. I did feel queer; he saw I did; but I think he was feeling the same. Little doubt now who had changed the note!

"You will not talk of it, will you?" I whispered to Tom, as we were dispersing about the room when the game was over.

"No," said he, "it shall not come out through me. I'm afraid, though, there's no mistake this time, Johnny. A half doubt of it has crossed my mind at odd moments."

Neither would I talk of it, even to Tod. After all, it was not proof positive. I had never, never thought of Oliver.

The Letsoms had a fine old garden, as all the gardens at Crabb were, and we strolled out in the twilight. The sun had set, but the sky was bright in the west. Valentine Chandler, for he had come in, kept of course by Jane Preen's side. Anyone might see that it was, as Tod called it, a gone case with them. It was no end of a pity, Val being just as unsteady and uncertain as the wind.

People do bolder things in the gloaming than in the garish daylight; and we fell to singing in the grotto—a semi-circular, half-open space with seats in it, surrounded at the back by the artificial rocks. Fanny began: she brought out an old guitar and twanged at it and sang for us, "The Baron of Mowbray;" where the false knight rides away laughing from the Baron's door and the Baron's daughter: that far-famed song of sixty years ago, which was said to have made a fortune for its composer.

The next to take up the singing was Valentine Chandler: and in listening to him you forgot all his short-comings. Never man had sweeter voice than he; and in his singing there was a singular charm impossible to be described. In his voice also—I mean when he spoke—there was always melody, and in his speech, when he chose to put it forth, a persuasive eloquence. This might have been instrumental in winning Jane Preen's heart; we are told that a man's heart is lost through his eye, a woman's through her ear. Poor Valentine! he might have been so nice a fellow—and he was going to the bad as fast as he could go.

The song he chose was a ridiculous old ditty all about love; it went to the tune of "Di tanti palpiti." Val chose it for Miss Jane and sung it to her; to her alone, mind you; the rest of us went for nothing.

"Here we meet, too soon to part,
Here to part will raise a smart,
Here I'd press thee to my heart,
Where none are set above thee.

Here I'd vow to love thee well;
Could but words unseal the spell,
Had but language power to tell,
I'd tell thee how I've loved thee.

Here's the rose that decks the door,
Here's the thorn that spreads the moor,
Here's the willow of the bower,
And the birds that rest above thee.

Had they power of life to see,
Sense of souls, like thee—and me,
Then would each a witness be
How dotingly I love thee.

Here we meet, too soon to part,
Here to part will raise a smart,
Here I'd press thee to my heart,
None e'er were there but thee."

Now, as you perceive, it is a most ridiculous song, foolish as love-songs in general are. But had you been sitting there with us in all the subtle romance imparted by the witching hour of the evening twilight, the soft air floating around, the clear sky above, one large silver star trembling in its blue depths, you would have felt entranced. The wonderful melody of the singer's voice, his distinct enunciation, the tender passion breathing through his soft utterance, and the slight, yet unmistakable emphasis given to the avowal of his love, thrilled us all. It was as decided a declaration of what he felt for Jane Preen as he could well make in this world. Once he glanced at her, and only once throughout; it was where I have placed the pause, as he placed it himself, "like thee—and me." As if his glance drew hers by some irresistible fascination, Jane, who had been sitting beneath the rock just opposite to him, her eyes cast down—as he made that pause and glanced at her, I say, she lifted them for a moment, and caught the glance. I may live to be an old man, but I shall never forget Val's song that night, or the charm it held for us. What, then, must it have held for Jane? And it is because that song and its charm lie still fresh on my memory, though many a year has since worn itself out, that I inscribe it here.

As the singing came to an end, dying softly away, no one for a moment or two broke the hushed silence that ensued. Valentine was the first to do it. He got up from his seat; went round to a ledge of rock and stood upon it, looking out in the distance. Had the sea been near, one might have thought he saw a ship, homeward bound.

II

Had the clerk of the weather been bribed with a purse of gold, he could not have sent a finer day than Thursday turned out to be. The sun shone, the air sparkled, and the bells of Islip church rang out from the old steeple. Islip was much behind other churches in many respects; so primitive, indeed, in some of its ways, that had an edifice of advanced views come sailing through the air to pay it a visit, it would have turned tail again and run away; but Islip could boast of one thing few churches can boast of—a delightful peal of bells.

The wedding took place at eleven o'clock, and was a quiet one. Its attendants were chiefly confined to the parties themselves and their immediate relatives, but that did not prevent other people from flocking in to see it.

I and Dick MacEveril went in together, and got a good place close up; which was lucky, for the old church is full of pillars and angles that obstruct the view. Emma was in white silk; her bridesmaid, Mary MacEveril, the same; it was the custom in those days. Tom looked uncommonly well; but he and she were both nervous. Old Paul

gave her away; and a thin aunt, who had a twisted nose, and had come on a visit to superintend the wedding, in place of Emma's dead mother, did nothing but weep. She wore an odd gown, pink one way, blue another; you might have thought she had borrowed its colours from their copper tea-kettle. Mrs. Chandler, Tom's mother, in grey silk, was smarter than she had ever been in her life; and his aunt, Mrs. Cramp, was resplendent in a dress bordering upon orange.

The ceremony came to an end very quickly, I thought—you do think so at most simple weddings; and Tom and his wife went away together in the first carriage. Next came the breakfast at Mr. Paul's; the aunt presiding in a gentle stream of tears. Early in the afternoon the bride and bridegroom left for London, on their way to the continent.

Everyone does not care to dash to a church to see a marriage; some would as soon think of running to look on at a funeral. Mr. Preen was one of these insensible people, and he, of course, did not care to go near it. He made game of Jane for doing so; but Jane wanted to see the dresses and the ceremony. Oliver had not the opportunity of going; and would not have used it though he had had it. Just about eleven o'clock, when the gay doings were in full swing, Mr. Preen took Oliver off to Worcester in the gig.

About a fortnight before, Mr. Preen had appointed a saddler in Worcester to be his agent for the new patent agricultural implements, for which he was himself agent-in-chief. Until this under agency should be well in hand, Mr. Preen considered it necessary to see the saddler often: for which purpose he drove into Worcester at least three times a week. Once, instead of going himself, he had sent Oliver, but this day was the first time the two had gone together. It might have been—one cannot tell—but it might have been that Mr. Preen discerned what this wedding of Emma Paul's must be to his son, and so took him out to divert his mind a bit.

Now, upon entering Worcester, to get to the saddler's it was necessary to drive through High Street and turn into Broad Street. At least, that was the straightforward route. But Oliver had not taken it the day he drove in alone; he had preferred the more roundabout way of the back streets. After driving through Sidbury, he—instead of going forward up College Street and so into High Street—went careering along Friar Street, along the whole length of New Street, turned up St. Swithen Street, or Goose Lane, or one of those dingy thoroughfares, made a dash across the top of High Street, and so into his destination, Broad Street. In returning he took the same way. What his objection to the better streets could be, he alone knew. To-day, however, Mr. Preen held the reins.

Mr. Preen was driving quietly up College Street, when Oliver spoke.

"I wish you'd put me down here, father."

"Put you down here!" repeated Mr. Preen, turning to look at him. "What for?"

"I want to get a little book for Jane," answered Oliver, glancing towards Mr. Eaton's house. "I shall be up in Broad Street nearly as soon as you are, if you want me there."

"I don't particularly want you," said Mr. Preen, crustily, "but you needn't be long before you come." And, drawing up to the side, he let Oliver get out.

Driving on to the saddler's, Mr. Preen transacted his business with him. When it was over, he went to the door, where his gig waited, and looked up and down the street, but saw nothing of Oliver.

"Hasn't given himself the trouble to come up! Would rather put his lazy legs astride one of those posts opposite the college, and watch for my passing back again!"

Which was of course rather a far-fetched idea of Mr. Preen's; but he spoke in a temper. Though, indeed, of late Oliver had appeared singularly inert; as if all spirit to move had gone out of him.

Mr. Preen got into his gig at the saddler's door and set off again. Turning into High Street, he drove gently down it, looking out on all sides, if truth must be told, for Oliver. This caused him to see Stephenson standing at the silversmith's door, the silversmith himself, back now for good at his business, being behind the counter. Now and then, since the bank-note was traced, Mr. Preen had made enquiries of Stephenson as to whether any news had been heard of its changer, but he had not done so lately. Not being in a hurry, he pulled up against the curb-stone. Stephenson crossed the flags to speak.

"Nothing turned up yet, I suppose," said Mr. Preen.

"Well, I can hardly say it has," replied Stephenson; "but I've seen the gentleman who paid it in to us."

"And who is it? and where was he?" cried Preen, eagerly.

Stephenson had stepped back a pace, and appeared to be looking critically at the horse and gig.

"It was last Saturday," he said, coming close again. "I had to take a parcel into Friar Street for one of our country customers, a farmer's wife who was spending the day with some people living down there, and I saw a gig bowling along. The young fellow in it was the one who changed the note."

"Are you sure of it?" returned Mr. Preen.

"Quite sure, sir. I had no opportunity of speaking to him or stopping him. He was driving at a good pace, and the moment he caught sight of me, for I saw him do that, he touched the horse and went on like a whirlwind.

Mr. Preen's little dark face took a darker frown. "*I* should have stopped him," he said, sternly. "You ought to have rushed after him, Stephenson, and called upon the street to help in the pur-

suit. You might, at least, have traced where he went to. A gig, you say he was in?"

"Yes," said Stephenson. "And, unless I am greatly mistaken, it was this very gig you are in now."

"What do you mean by that?" retorted Preen, haughtily.

"I took particular notice of the horse and gig, so as to recognise them again if ever I got the chance; and I say that it was this gig and this horse, sir. There's no mistake about it."

They stared into one another's eyes, one face looking up, and the other looking down. All in a moment, Stephenson saw the other face turn ghastly white. It had come into Mr. Preen's recollection amidst his bewilderment, that Oliver had gone into Worcester last Saturday afternoon, driving the horse and gig.

"I can't understand this! Who should be in my gig?" he cried, calling some presence of mind to his aid. "Last Saturday, you say? In the afternoon?"

"Last Saturday afternoon, close upon four o'clock. As I turned down Lich Street, I saw the lay-clerks coming out of College. Afternoon service is generally over a little before four," added Stephenson. "He was driving straight into Friar Street from Sidbury."

Another recollection flashed across Mr. Preen: Oliver's asking just now to be put down in College Street. Was it to prevent his passing through High Street? Was he afraid to pass through it?

"He is a nice-looking young fellow," said Stephenson; "has a fair, mild face; but he was the one who changed the note."

"That may be; but as to his being in my gig, it is not——Why, I was not in town at all on Saturday," broke off Mr. Preen, with a show of indignant remonstrance.

"No, Mr. Preen; the young man was in it alone," said Stephenson, who probably had his own thoughts upon the problem.

"Well, I can't stay longer now; I'm late already," said Mr. Preen. "Good morning, Stephenson." And away he drove with a dash.

Oliver was waiting in College Street, standing near the Hare and Hounds Inn. Mr. Preen pulled up.

"So you did not choose to come on!" he said.

"Well, I—I thought there'd be hardly time, and I might miss you; I went to get my hair cut," replied Oliver, as he settled himself in his place beside his father.

Mr. Preen drove on in silence until they were opposite the Commandery gates in the lower part of Sidbury. Then he spoke again.

"What made you drive through Friar Street on Saturday last, instead of going the direct way?"

"Through—Friar Street?" stammered Oliver.

"Through Friar Street, instead of High Street," repeated Mr. Preen, n a sharp, passionate accent.

"Oh, I remember. High Street is so crowded on a market day;

the back streets are quiet," said Oliver, as if he had a lump in his throat, and could not make his voice heard.

"And in taking the back streets you avoid the silversmith's, and the risk you run of being recognised; is that it?" savagely retorted Mr. Preen.

Not another word did he speak, only drove on home at a furious pace. Oliver knew all then: the disgrace for which he had been so long waiting, had come upon him.

But when they got indoors, Mr. Preen let loose the vials of his wrath upon Oliver. Before his mother, before Jane, he published his iniquity. It was he, Oliver, who had stolen the ten pound note; it was he who had so craftily got it changed at Worcester. Oliver spoke not a word of denial, made no attempt at excuse or defence; he stood with bent head and pale, meek face, his blue eyes filled with utter misery. The same look of misery lay in Mrs. Preen's eyes; she faintly reproached him amid tears and sobs. Jane was simply stunned.

"You must go away now and hide yourself; I can't keep you here to be found and pounced upon," roared Mr. Preen. "By the end of the week you must be gone somewhere. Perhaps you can pick up a living in London."

"Yes, I will go," said Oliver, meekly. And at the first lull in the storm he crept up to his room.

He did not come down to dinner; did not come to tea. Jane carried up a cup of tea upon a waiter and some bread-and-butter, and put it down outside the chamber door, which he had bolted.

Later, in passing his room, she saw the door open and went in. Cup and plate were both empty, so he had taken the refreshment. He was not in the house, was not in the garden. Putting on her sun-bonnet and a light shawl, she ran to the Inlets.

Oliver was there. He sat, gazing moodily at the brook and the melancholy osier-twigs, that grew beside it. Jane sat down and bent his poor distressed face upon her shoulder.

"Dear Oliver! Don't take it so to heart. I know you must have been sorely tempted."

Bending there upon her, her arms clasping him, yielding to the loving sympathy, so grateful after those harsh reproaches, he told her all, under cover of the gathering shades of evening. Yes, he had been tempted—and had yielded to the temptation.

He wanted money badly for necessary things, and things that he had learned to deem necessaries, and he had it not. A pair of new gloves now and again, a necktie to replace his shabby ones, a trifle of loose silver in his pocket. He owed a small sum to MacEveril, and wanted to repay him. Once or twice he had asked a little money of his father, and was refused. His mother would give him a few shillings, when pressed, but grumbled over it. So Oliver wrote to a friend at Tours, whom he had known well, asking if he would lend him some

That was the first week in June. His friend wrote back in answer that he could lend him some after quarter day, the 24th, but not before; he would send him over ten pounds then, if that would do.

Never a thought had presented itself to Oliver of touching the ten pounds in his father's letter to Mr. Paul, which he had sealed and saw posted. But on the following afternoon, Wednesday, he saw the letter lying on Mr. Hanborough's desk; the temptation assailed him, and he took it.

It may be remembered that Mr. Preen had gone out that hot day, leaving Oliver a lot of work to do. He got through it soon after four o'clock, and went dashing over the cross route to Islip and into Mr. Paul's office, for he wanted to see Dick MacEveril. The office was empty; not a soul was in it; and as Oliver stood, rather wondering at that unusual fact, he saw a small pile of letters, evidently just left by the postman, lying on the desk close to him. The uppermost of the letters he recognised at once; it was the one sent by his father. "If I might borrow the ten pounds inside that now, I should be at ease; I would replace it with the ten pounds coming to me from Tours, and it might never get known," whispered Satan in his ear, with plausible cunning.

Never a moment did he allow himself for thought, never an instant's hesitation served to stop him. Catching up the letter, he thrust it into his breast pocket, and set off across country again at a tearing pace, not waiting to see MacEveril.

He seemed to have flown over hedges and ditches and to be home in no time. Little wonder that when he was seen sitting under the walnut tree in the garden and was called in to tea, his mother and sister exclaimed at his heated face. They never suspected he had been out.

All that night Oliver lay awake: partly wondering how he should dispose of his prize to make it available; partly telling himself, in shame-faced reproach, that he would not use it, but send it back to old Paul. It came into his mind that if he did use it he might change it at the silversmith's as if for the Todhetleys, the Squire's name on the back suggesting the idea to him. It would not do, he thought, to go into a shop, any shop, purchase some trifling article and tender a ten-pound note, in payment. That might give rise to suspicion. Some months before, when at Crabb Cot, he had heard Mrs. Todhetley relate the history of her brooch, where she bought it, what she paid for it, and all about it, to Colonel Letsom's wife and other people, for it happened that several callers had come in together. The brooch had been passed round the company and admired. Oliver remembered this, and resolved to make use of it to disarm suspicion at the silversmith's. He knew the principal shops in Worcester very well indeed, and Worcester itself. He had stayed for some time, when sixteen, with an uncle, who was living there; but he had not visited the city since coming to Duck Brook.

Thursday, the day following that on which he took the money, was the day of the picnic. Oliver started with Jane for it in the morning, as may be remembered, the ten-pound note hidden safely about him. Much to Oliver's surprise his mother put seven shillings into his hand. "You'll not want to use it, and must give it me back to-morrow," she said, "but it does not look well to go to a thing of this sort with quite empty pockets." Oliver thanked her, kissed her, and they drove off. Before reaching Mrs. Jacob Chandler's, after passing Islip Grange—the property of Lady Fontaine, as may be remembered, who was first cousin to John Paul—they overtook Sam, walking on to take back the gig. "We may as well get out here," said Oliver, and he pulled up. Getting out, and helping out Jane, he sent Sam and the gig back at once. He bade his sister walk on alone to Mrs. Chandler's, saying he wanted to do a little errand first. But he charged her not to mention that; only to say, if questioned, that he would join them by and-bye. He ran all the way to the station, regardless of the heat, and caught a train for Worcester.

The rest is known. Oliver changed the note at the silversmith's, bought himself a pair of dandy gloves, with one or two other small matters, and made the best of his way back again. But it was past the middle of the afternoon when he got to the picnic: trains do not choose our time for running, but their own. Jane wondered where he had been. Hearing of the pigeon-match, she thought it was there. She asked him, in a whisper, where he had found those delicate gloves; Oliver laughed and said something about a last relic from Tours.

And there it was. He had taken the note; he, Oliver Preen; and got the gold for it. That day of the picnic was in truth the worst he had ever experienced, the one hard day of all his life, as he had remarked to Jane. Not only had he committed a deed in it which might never be redeemed, but he also learnt that Emma Paul's love was given not to him, but to another. It was for her sake he had coveted new gloves and money in his pockets, that he might not look despicable in her sight.

The dearest and surest of expectations are those that fail. While Oliver, as the days went on, was feverishly looking out, morning after morning, for the remittance from Tours, he received a letter to say it was not coming. His friend, with many expressions of regret, wrote to the effect that he was unable to send it at present; later, he hoped to do so. Of course, it never came. And Oliver had not been able to replace the money, and—this was the end of it.

In a whispering, sobbing tone, he told these particulars by degrees to Jane as they sat there. She tried to comfort him; said it might never be known beyond themselves at home; rather advocated his going away for a short period, as proposed, while things righted themselves, and their father's anger cooled down. But Oliver could not be comforted. Then, leaving the unsatisfactory theme,

she tried another, and began telling him of the wedding at Islip that morning, and of how Tom and Emma looked ——

"Don't, Jane," he interrupted; and his wailing, shrinking tone seemed to betray the keenest pain of all.

They walked home together in silence, Jane clinging to his arm. The night shades lay upon the earth, the stars were shining in the sky. Oliver laid his hand upon the garden gate and paused.

"Do you remember, Jane, when I was coming in here for the first time, how a strange shiver took me, and you thought I must have caught a chill. It was a warning, my dear; a warning of the evil that lay in store for me."

He would not go into the parlour to supper, but went softly up to his room and shut himself in for the night. Poor Oliver! Poor, poor Oliver!

The following day, Friday, Mr. Preen, allowing himself the unwonted luxury of a holiday for a day's shooting, was away betimes. For the afternoon and evening, Mrs. Jacob Chandler's daughters, Clementina, Georgiana, and Julietta, had organised a party to celebrate their cousin Tom's wedding; Miss Julietta called it a "flare-up."

Jane Preen had promised, for herself and for Oliver, to be there by three o'clock. For Oliver! She made herself ready after dinner; and then, looking everywhere for her brother, found him standing in the road just outside the garden gate. He said he was not going. Jane reproached him, and he quite laughed at her. *He* go into company now! she might know better. But Jane had great influence over him, and as he walked with her along the road—for she was going to walk in and walk back again at night—she nearly persuaded him to fetch her. Only nearly; not quite. Oliver finally refused, and they had almost a quarrel.

Then the tears ran down Jane's cheeks. Her heart was aching to pain for him; and her object in pressing him to come was to take him out of his loneliness.

"Just this one evening, Oliver!" she whispered, clinging to him and kissing him. "I don't ask you a favour often."

And Oliver yielded. "I'll come for you, Janey," he said, kissing her in return. "That is, I will come on and meet you; I cannot go to the house."

With that, they parted. But in another minute, Jane was running back again.

"You will be *sure* to come, Oliver? You won't disappoint me? You won't go from your word?"

Oliver felt a little annoyed; the sore heart grows fretful. "I swear I'll come, then," he said; "I'll meet you, alive or dead."

I was at the party. Not Tod; he had gone shooting. We spent the afternoon in the garden. It was not a large party, after all; only the Letsoms, Jane Preen, and the Chandler girls; but others were

expected later. Jane had a disconsolate look. Knowing nothing of the trouble at Duck Brook, I thought she was sad because Valentine had not come early, according to promise. We knew later that he had been kept by what he called a long-winded client.

At five o'clock we went indoors to tea. Those were the days of real, old-fashioned teas, not sham ones, as now. Hardly had we seated ourselves round the table, and Mrs. Jacob Chandler was enquiring who took sugar and who didn't, when one of the maids came in.

"If you please, Miss Preen, the gig is come for you," she said.

"The gig!" exclaimed Jane. "Come for me! You must be mistaken, Susan."

"It is at the gate, Miss Jane, and Sam's in it. He says that his master and missus have sent him to take you home immediate."

Jane, all astonishment, followed by some of us, went out to see what Sam could mean. Sam only repeated in a stolid kind of way the message he had given to Susan. His master and mistress had despatched him for Miss Jane and she must go home at once.

"Is anything the matter?—anyone ill?" asked Jane, turning pale.

Sam, looking more stolid than before, professed not to know anything; he either did not or would not. Miss Jane had to go, and as quick as she could, was all he would say.

Jane put on her things, said good-bye in haste, and went out again to the gig. Sam drove off at a tangent before she had well seated herself.

"Now, Sam, what's the matter?" she began.

Sam, in about three stolid words, protested, as before, he couldn't say *what* was the matter; except that he had been sent off for Miss Jane.

Jane noticed, and thought it odd, that he did not look at her as he spoke, though he was frank and open by habit; he had never looked in any of their faces since coming to the door.

"Where's Mr. Oliver?" she asked. But Sam only muttered that he "couldn't say" and drove swiftly.

They went on in silence after that, Jane seeing it would be useless to enquire further, and were soon at Duck Brook. She felt very uneasy. What she feared was, that her father and Oliver might have quarrelled, and that the latter was about to be turned summarily out of doors.

"Why, there's Mr. Oliver!" she exclaimed. "Pull up, Sam."

They were passing the first Inlet. Oliver stood at the top of it, facing the road, evidently looking out for her, as Jane thought. His gaze was fixed, his face white as death.

"I told you to pull up, Sam; how dare you disobey me and drive on in that way?" cried Jane; for Sam had whipped up the horse nstead of stopping. Jane, looking at his face saw it had gone white too.

"There he is! there he is again! There's Mr. Oliver!"

They had approached the other Inlet as Jane spoke. Oliver stood at the top of it, exactly as he had stood at the other, his gaze fixed on her, his face ghastly. Not a muscle of his face moved; a dead man could not be more still. Sam, full of terror, was driving on like lightning, as if some evil thing were pursuing him.

And now Jane turned pale. What did it mean? these two appearances? It was totally impossible for Oliver to be at the last Inlet, if it was he who stood at the other. A bird of the air might have picked him up, carried him swiftly over the trees and dropped him at the second Inlet; nothing else could have done it in the time. What did it mean?

Mr. Preen was waiting at the door to receive Jane. He came a little way with slow steps down the path to meet her as the gig stopped. She ran in at the gate.

"What has happened, papa?" she cried. "Where's Oliver?"

Oliver was up stairs, lying upon his bed—dead. Mr. Preen disclosed it to her as gently as he knew how.

It was all too true. Oliver had died about two hours before. He had shot himself at the Inlets, close by the melancholy osiers that grew over the brook.

Oliver had accompanied Jane to the end of Brook Lane. There, at the Islip Road, they parted; she going on to Crabb, Oliver walking back again. Upon reaching the Inlets, that favourite spot of his, he sat down on the bench that faced the highway; the self-same bench Jane had sat on when she was watching for his arrival from Tours, in the early days of spring. He had not sat there above a minute when he saw his father, with one or two more gentlemen, get over the gate from the field opposite. They were returning from shooting, and had their guns in their hands. Mr. Preen walked quickly over the road to Oliver.

"Take my gun indoors," he said; "I am not going in just yet. It is loaded."

He walked away down the road with his friends, after speaking. Oliver took the gun, walked slowly down one of the Inlets, and put himself on the nearest bench there, lodging the gun against the end. In a few minutes there arose a loud report.

Sam was in the upper part of the field on the other side the brook with the waggon and waggoner. He turned to look where the noise came from, and thought he saw someone lying on the ground by the bench. They both came round in haste, he and the waggoner, and found Oliver Preen lying dead with the gun beside him. Running for assistance, Sam helped to carry him home, and then went for the nearest doctor; but it was all of no avail. Oliver was dead.

Was it an accident, or was it intentional? People asked the question. At the coroner's inquest, Mr. Preen, who was so affected he could

hardly give evidence, said that, so far as he believed, Oliver was one of the last people likely to lay violent hands on himself; he was of too calm and gentle a temperament for that. The rustic jury, pitying the father and believing him, gave Oliver the benefit of the doubt. Loaded guns were dangerous, they observed, apt to go off of themselves almost; and they brought it in Accidental Death.

But Jane knew better. I thought I knew better. I'm afraid Mr. Preen knew better.

And what of that appearance of Oliver which Jane saw? It could not have been Oliver in the flesh, but I think it must have been Oliver in the spirit. Many a time and oft in the days that followed did Jane recount it over to me; it seemed a relief to her distress to talk of it. "He said he would come, alive or dead, to meet me; and he came."

And I, Johnny Ludlow, break off here to state that the account of this apparition is strictly true. Every minute particular attending it, even to the gig coming with Sam in it to fetch Jane from the tea-table, is a faithful record of that which occurred.

I took an opportunity of questioning Sam, asking whether he had seen the appearance. It was as we were coming away from the grave after the funeral. Oliver was buried in Duck Brook churchyard, close under the clock which had told him the time when he stood with his father posting the letters that past afternoon at Dame Sym's window. "We are too late, father," he had said. But for being too late the tragedy might never have happened, for the letter, which caused all the trouble and commotion, would have reached Mr. Paul's hands safely the next morning.

"No, sir," Sam answered me, "I can't say that I saw anything. But just as Miss Jane spoke, calling out that Mr. Oliver was there, a kind of shivering wind seemed to take me, and I turned icy cold. It was not her words that could have done it, sir, for I was getting so before she spoke. And at the last Inlet, when she called it out again, I went almost out of my mind with cold and terror. The horse was affrighted too; his coat turned wet."

That was the tragedy: no one can say I did wrong to call it one. For years and years it has been in my mind to write it. But I had hoped to end the paper less sadly; only the story has lengthened itself out, and there's no space left. I meant to have told of Jane's brighter fate in the after days with Valentine, the one lover of her life. For Val pulled himself up from his reckless ways, though not at Islip; and in a distant land they are now sailing down the stream of life together, passing through, as we all have to do, its storms and its sunshine.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

Stockholm.

THE Venice of the North. A very pretty title, suggesting everything that is beautiful and romantic. Gondolas flashing about in summer twilight ; serenades wafted across still waters ; lovely women reclining on voluptuous cushions, listening to whispered vows. In no sense of the word and in no aspect does Stockholm respond to this description. In vain will you look for aBridge of Sighs, a Palace of the Doges, a St. Mark's Square, or the Sacred Pigeons.

At a first glance, indeed, Stockholm, away from its quays, appears a very ordinary city. Streets for the most part narrow ; houses stiff, gloomy, and modern ; shops very second-rate. So far it might be a small Paris or Vienna, without the attractions of either. It seems full of strange turnings and angles which often bring you unexpectedly back to the point whence you started. There are squares that are anything but quadrangular ; streets that are not straight, but, en revanche, are sometimes very hilly. What is there in all this to merit so great renown ?

Only after closer acquaintance is the fact discovered that Stockholm gains upon the affections, and possesses one of those rare natures towards whom familiarity breeds, not contempt, but admiration.

Even the Grand Hotel is vexing to the spirit, as a mysterious house possessing unlimited command of back rooms, but apparently very little frontage. Unless firm in declaring that a front room and a large supply of air are necessaries of life, you will be consigned to

regions dull, melancholy, and dispiriting, overlooking a long, narrow yard full of echoes, where creaking pump handles have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and shouting, running, and grooming never cease; whilst as a climax to this pandemonium, an occasional barrel-organ strays in, and sets up an echo of unearthly wailings that in the first moment half paralyse you, and the second send you flying in search of peace.

The search will not end in any public drawing-room; for the hotel, with any amount of resources at command, is not liberal enough to provide its guests with that luxury. It has a great reputation, thanks more to its position than to any generous management.

As to position, it has everything in its favour, and, so far, is the one hotel in Stockholm. None ever dream of going elsewhere, except Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians, whose visits are generally more for business than pleasure. For these there are smaller and no doubt equally comfortable inns; where, futhermore, you may be a personage and not a number, and are not referred to the porter upon every possible occasion, for every sort of information.

It must be admitted that the porter of the Grand Hotel, in brass-buttons and gold-laced cap, looked a personage in himself, was a walking Encyclopædia and conversing Bradshaw, had all languages at his command, was accurate in all his statements. In a word, he was to be relied on, but was so much in request that his window was generally like the box-office of a popular French theatre, where people "make tail," and each takes his turn. It was more difficult to obtain audience of him than of the king's majesty.

The very passages of the hotel are distinguished by names, like the thoroughfares of the town. Whilst you, perhaps, are living in room 21, corridor London Street, you chance upon a friend who begs you to look in upon him in room 45, corridor Christiania Street. Your factotum—if travelling with such an impediment—has been consigned to No. 3,000, New York Street.

But to return to the position of the hotel. It is splendid, with a view from its front windows very difficult to equal. Before you the broad quay gives place to the river, flowing into Lake Malaren on the one hand, into the Baltic on the other. A fine sheet of water, spanned by handsome bridges that connect the different islands of which Stockholm is composed. On the banks of the further quay, its base almost washed by the stream, the palace rears its head: an immense quadrangular building, dignified and imposing, containing many treasures. It seems to keep watch and ward over the town, a great crowd of surrounding houses; almost places itself in rivalry with towers and steeples of neighbouring churches.

Hills rise above and beyond the town, well clothed with buildings; ancient tenements perched on granite heights, singular and romantic looking; full of "tone" for the æsthetic and "effect" for the artist. These have reached an elevation far above all palaces and towers.

Most interesting of all is the wide river itself. In some instances —from the hotel windows, for example—no vessels will be seen, but a crowd of masts will tell you that round that curve ships are moored, loading and unloading, bound for all parts of the world. On the water before you steamers dart about in all directions, like arrows from a bow, appearing and disappearing; now making for one landing stage, now for another; discharging a stream of passengers, receiving others; waiting a few moments, sounding a bell, darting off again, with flags fluttering. Many of these steamers are mere launches, running between Stockholm and one or other of its countless suburbs or neighbouring isles.

At night—especially Sunday night—the scene is almost more animated, still harder to find in any other part of the world. Quays brilliantly illuminated, the electric light shining out in dazzling contrast with the feebler gas-lamp. If the king is not in residence, the palace itself is dark and closed. The old houses on those rocky and more distant heights reflect a myriad gleams. Every window seems an illumination. From pleasure gardens on yonder hill, rockets shoot up and break into a thousand many coloured balls, dying out like meteors in the darkness. Smaller fireworks blaze up for a moment, and in their turn expire. For it is Sunday night, and the Swedes are at their favourite amusement.

The water is one scene of flashing lamps, green, red, and white. Too dark to see the steamers, you may trace their courses by these lights: courses so silent that the gleams seem to possess a separate and independent existence. Gigantic fire-flies, will-o'-the-wisps, flitting over the winding surface of the water. A scene of enchantment, beautiful and interesting, only to be rightly viewed and enjoyed from one of the upper windows of the Grand Hotel. This alone is worth a visit to Stockholm: would tempt you some day to repeat it. Windows open to the dark blue summer sky, the intense heat and glare of the day succeeded by a restful darkness and a cool refreshing breeze, you may sit and gaze and muse for hours and never tire. The scene has neither weariness nor monotony.

Before the hotel, on the other side the water, under the very shadow of the palace, are pleasure gardens, with just sufficient illumination to keep your footsteps from stumbling, and permit deluded mortals to gaze into each other's eyes. Here crowds sit in the evening cool, sipping harmless beverages at small round tables, under bowery branches, on a level with the river, able to watch the lights of the boats darting to and fro, whilst listening to the music of an orchestra composed of boys.

These strains are sufficiently distant not to disturb your meditations and enjoyment of the surrounding scenes. As to the gardens themselves, distance lends them enchantment. A closer acquaintance shows up their atmosphere as frivolous and unpleasant, curiosity is quickly satisfied, and you are glad to escape.

Frivolous must be the verdict upon most of the amusements of Stockholm and upon many of the people. Such, at any rate, was the impression made upon us, who, as strangers, looked upon everything from an outside point of view. In vain we searched for something solid, something intellectual and elevating; something even simply amusing.

As a religious city, it stands very far down the list. And, seeing how Sunday is spent there, the reputation is, perhaps, only too well merited. The day seems devoted to pleasure which ceases to be rational. This does not appear so much in the town itself: that, quiet and orderly, with closed shops, has nothing to offend. But without the town is Djurgarten, a large district or park given up to every kind of amusement: an unfashionable Vanity Fair. Shows and booths, marionettes, circuses, and the usual list. Restaurants without number, some of them, on rising ground, overlook the surrounding neighbourhood, and, for the trouble of mounting a small picturesque tower, a splendid view of land and water will be the reward. Some of the restaurants have gardens, in which people—the quieter and more decent portion—sit under the evening sky and listen to the band.

Beyond all this, round the broad road, is a more secluded part; a wild, rocky looking park, finely wooded, adorned with a statue of Bellman, the Burns of Sweden. Near it is his favourite oak, under which he often reclined, thinking out and jotting down his verses. Here, day after day, year after year, he might be found; a man of humble birth, yet the intimate of kings.

Winding round at the foot of the hill on which stands Hasselbacken, most famous restaurant in or near Stockholm, you are delighted by grassy slopes and shady avenues. Villas hide themselves in charmed groves, lovely views of the Baltic and of Stockholm are disclosed. On a week day, when all is quiet and orderly, Djurgard is a very pleasant spot. You are surprised at so much apparently natural wildness so near the capital. All theatres and places of amusement are beyond your ken; on the other side; no one disturbs your solitude.

But it is very different on Sundays; very different the Sunday we visited it, like Miss Rosa Dartle, for the sake of information.

All day, at short intervals, boats had been running to Djurgard from the landing stages in front of the hotel. Boats, for that matter, had been running everywhere, starting for neighbouring islands as early as eight or nine o'clock, loaded with excursionists, packed, standing, as closely as herrings in a barrel. Brass bands sent forth exhilarating discords, and each vessel was gorgeous with an array of flags distributed rainbow fashion. Not less gay and lively the excursionists, as, in highest spirits, they disappeared amidst the inevitable display of handkerchiefs.

All the afternoon and evening the small steamboats running to

Djurgard were crowded with eager passengers; and, presently, we also, wondering what sort of an experience it would be, followed the multitude.

At Djurgard, the sight was astonishing. Twilight had fallen, and the neighbourhood was in course of illumination. So dense the crowd, not all Stockholm, but half Sweden seemed there. The roads were thronged with a surging mass. It was Pandemonium. Boys and men went about with rattles, dispensing their agreeable favours upon the unsuspicious. "Nothing happens like the unexpected." All the roadside cafés were crammed with riotous drinkers. Bands of men, arm in arm, reeled about. Disorganisation and riot seemed the order of the day—or rather of the night. Such a scene on a Sunday was surely never found elsewhere. The oft-quoted levity of the French was as nothing to it. The most thoughtless spectator might have felt himself saddened and subdued. Open conveyances with double freights tried to steer a way through the reckless multitude. Heavy tramcars, laden with pleasure seekers, dashed heedlessly along, scattering the crowd right and left. And still they came. Boats, carriages, tramcars, all poured in their contributions. There was no end to the supply.

Hasselbacken was crowded, but with a crowd altogether orderly and unobjectionable. There was not a vacant seat in the large gardens, brilliant with rows and clusters of lamps. From the restaurant itself came a sound of billiard balls, and floods of light, and a restless, moving multitude. From the roadway, between the pauses of the band, the riot and noise of that other disorderly crowd, shouting, singing, whistling; drivers swearing as every moment they escaped demolishing half a dozen incapables. The heavier rolling of the cars with their perpetual warnings crowned the uproar.

And this goes on Sunday after Sunday, "till pale concluding winter comes at last and shuts the scene." What then? Do they make Stockholm itself lively with midnight orgies? Do the different cafés become uproarious and crowded, even as now they were crowded on weekdays? The theatres also are no doubt a strong rallying point. For winter is the season at Stockholm.

In summer, everyone who can do so escapes to green pastures. Those who own country places go "into residence." It is easy for many of the unpretending middle classes to possess such retreats within a short distance, on the mainland itself or on one of the islands with which the waters abound. Large, airy, comfortable wooden houses, gay as brilliant colours can make them, are quickly built, at no great cost.

Very picturesque are many of these places. The house itself, cool and cheerful, with large windows shaded by verandahs and porticos hospitably open, is protected on three sides by trees admitting you to shady avenues and quiet walks. Within a few yards of the house the waters of the lake splash and surge and sometimes dash up in

angry waves. Most of them have small bathing houses where you may take an early dip in the water, or indulge in a longer swim. In fine weather, the inhabitants row and steam about the endless lake, fish, and pay each other visits on the water, organise picnics to lovely solitudes and shady woods, live an altogether pleasant and healthful life. There is greater freedom about it than is generally found in any English life of similar condition. Here they pass their summers, and one envies them the privilege. These inexhaustible retreats, beautiful and charming, are all within a short distance of their winter home. They may take a morning steamer, visit their town houses, do some shopping, and return in time for the mid-day meal. Once back, so great the change, so absolute the solitude, so sylvan the retreat, were they to sail up the Gulf of Bothnia, or retire to Finland, or make for the North Cape, they could scarcely be more secluded, whilst they certainly would be less happy and civilised.

Under such influences, mind and spirit should reach a higher tone, and probably do so for the time being; for, after all, impressions with the greater number are as the sandmarks that pass away with every succeeding tide. And, perhaps, what seems frivolous to us does not appear so to them. Habit becomes second nature. We can only understand Shakespeare by the Shakespeare that is within us. He who has learned to aim only at a tree will never reach the sky. Autres peuples, autres mœurs. If the quotation is slightly varied, it adapts itself all the better to the situation. It is useless to talk of colour to the blind, of harmonies to the deaf, of the pleasures of motion to the paralysed, of the happiness of giving to the miser, of ideals and aspirations to the unholy.

In summer Sunday evenings the town cafés are a good deal neglected, but during the week they have their revenge. Two bands play in the town squares or gardens, besides the boys' orchestra near the palace. It was difficult to listen to either without getting into the noisy crowd that went there night after night to smoke or drink, or take their supper al fresco or under cover, according to weather and inclination. The only rule absolute was—plenty of noise: enough on occasion to drown all the efforts of the music.

One of these bands was almost the only good one out of the very many we heard in Sweden. Its selections were also of a better character than one generally found. Escaping the crowd of loungers and multitude of small tables on Charles XII. Square, it was pleasant to stroll about its quieter and more deserted walks, amongst the trees and flower beds, and listen to wild Swedish airs, original and captivating, and well-played overtures: with now and then a selection from Wagner by way of bonne bouche.

But on the whole the music and amusements of Stockholm were light and trifling, like so many of its people. These appear to possess all the lightness of the French without the gay wit and sparkle which in a manner seems to redeem them from frivolity. From the

Swedish you look for some of the coldness of a northern temperament, more solidity of character, earnestness of purpose. All this they have possessed, as witness the history of Sweden and the great part she has sometimes played in the world. Very much of the present type was imported by Gustavus Adolphus, who, spending his early life in France, when he came to the throne introduced into his own country the traits of that feather-headed but pleasant people. The type did not bear transplanting, and so Gustavus Adolphus made of his people a singular combination: sometimes yielding unsatisfactory results; bringing forth sparrows where eagles should have been.

PALACE, STOCKHOLM.

But there is another side to the picture. Very much in Stockholm itself is strangely pleasant and interesting. Quays full of life and industry; quays, as it were, in the very centre of the town, forming a scene not found elsewhere. A multitude of steamers and other vessels navigating to the islands of the Baltic, round the southern coast, northwards up the Gulf of Bothnia, and across to St. Petersburg: many to England and to more distant shores.

At all hours these quays, washed by the waters of the Baltic, are full of life. Passengers for ever coming and going; vessels innumerable threading their way through a mass of shipping to moorings alongside; others, outward bound, slipping their cables. A forest of masts in perpetual motion; bells ringing; officers shouting and doing their best to steer clear of collision. A blue sky over all, and probably a fresh breeze blowing. All down the quays vessels moored

after their fashion—bows quayward, sterns outward; an arrangement giving an immense number of ships each its own small share of landing.

On your way to some of these quays you may pass through the fruit market, and boast great powers of self-control if its temptations are resisted. All fruits you can mention, ripe and luscious, are displayed in abundance. Surely these are not northern latitudes, but the warm lands of the south? The display is worthy of Spain or Italy. Not least attractive are some of the pretty women who stand and serve. Glances from soft blue eyes, smiles displaying perfect pearls,

STOCKHOLM MUSEUM, WITH GRAND HOTEL IN BACKGROUND.

handkerchiefs and headgear cunningly disposed allure to excesses in spite of yourself. And if they put on a few extra öre in honour of your English manhood (one must pay for one's privileges), as you know quite well they do, and as they know that you know, there is consolation in being taken in so very straightforwardly.

One day we so wandered through the market on our way to the Riddarholm, where you may embark for any part of the world, and we were about to embark for Drottningholm, one of the summer palaces of the king. Whether the eyes of some of the fruit women—soft and bright as a gazelle's—or their tempting wares formed the greater loadstone, it would be hard to say. As far as we were concerned, both had to be resisted. The pitiless clock of the Riddarholms church—mausoleum of the kings of Sweden—struck the fatal hour, and with hurried steps, that would have been lingering and

slow as those of Adam and Eve leaving Paradise, we caught the steamer as the gangway was being withdrawn. But a good time was coming. The market was stationary, and we were not bound to Drottningholm for ever.

These excursions, the beauty and attraction of Stockholm, are as numerous as charming. The islands stretching away into the Baltic, or up into the waters of Lake Malaren, are said to be not less than 1,300. Some of them are so small as merely to represent a few yards of wild and wooded surface—Elysium for a summer picnic. Others increase to formidable size. It would take months to explore the beauties of this lake alone. Months of an ideal existence amidst a luxury of wood, and water, and islands: water often as calm and blue as the summer sky, and islands a romantic vision of wild rocks and undergrowth, ferns and forest flowers: experiences none can imagine who have never visited them: fresh scenes for exploration day after day, week after week, in endless extent.

Never had Stockholm looked so picturesque as we steered cleverly out of the maze of vessels, and went down the river. To our left were rocky heights, and houses of a deep red that harmonised well with the green trees about them. The waters branched off into numberless thickly wooded creeks. Small islands were in all directions; endless reaches of wooded shores accompanied us.

Presently a sharpe curve to the right brought into view the broad, white, somewhat imposing frontage of Drottningholm—perfection of a summer retreat. It stands on a large island, belonging exclusively to the king. One can imagine the rest to mind and spirit found here in exchange for the palace of the town, the fatigues of receptions, the restraints of social life, the cares of state, that, in Sweden, are of no light order.

The palace, built very near the water, lies at the head of a short secluded arm of the lake. Before the windows is a small landing stage, where, to-day, a couple of small boats and a steam launch were waiting, ready manned. Our steamer's moorings were not many yards away. Large waving trees were about the house, long avenues, ancient and splendid, stretched far down behind the palace. The grounds, laid out in the old French style with somewhat stiff lines, reminded one of Versailles without its terraces.

These grounds were open to visitors, so also was a portion of the palace. Rooms, large and noble, chiefly interesting for the portraits of the modern school, of monarchs, past and present, of many lands. Amongst these was a most charming portrait of Queen Victoria in the early days of her reign, facing one equally good of the Prince Consort: the latter, without doubt, the handsomest face in the room. A smaller room adjoining was devoted to female portraits, and among the handsomest and most regal was Eugénie, Empress of the French; most charming, Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria.

One could have lingered long, for rooms and portraits were of great

interest, and the attendant left you to wander at will. But time passed, and one had to leave the pomp and splendour of an ideal world for realities. For these rooms, thrown open at stated times, with no trace of habitation about them, echoing to the footsteps of a few silent gazers, always seem to belong to an existence that is only ideal. Some of the very gazers, unconsciously, put on an awestruck aspect, speak in hushed whispers: effects which never fail to divide one's attention with surrounding objects. What would they do if royalty suddenly appeared before them? Paralyse into statues? fall down in silent homage? or flee away as in presence of an apparition?

We left the ideal of palaces and portraits, exchanged art for nature. Those long avenues with their ancient and noble trees were infinitely pleasant. The sun chequered the broad deserted walks with deep shadows. Wandering about in great peace and contentment, the palace clock presently struck the hour that summoned us away, and the steamer carried on the warning with shrill whistle.

On board we sought and found a quiet part of the vessel, the most likely to be unmolested, when a party of six or eight Americans invaded this retreat with a great sense of possession. Taking us for Swedes, or probably ignoring our existence, they plunged into a very entertaining conversation. They were American in every sense; had been doing the Grand Tour, and seen as much in two months as an ordinary mortal would accomplish in six: mixed up capitals bewilderingly, compared notes, brought up reminiscences, fell into deep waters and fell out again, transplanted the Munich galleries to Florence, and finally recorded how their light went out and they lost themselves actually in the Roman Catacombs. Like all Americans, they were self-satisfied, and occasionally reproached each other with "copying English" in tones which declared that the consummation of reproach had been uttered. Language could go no farther.

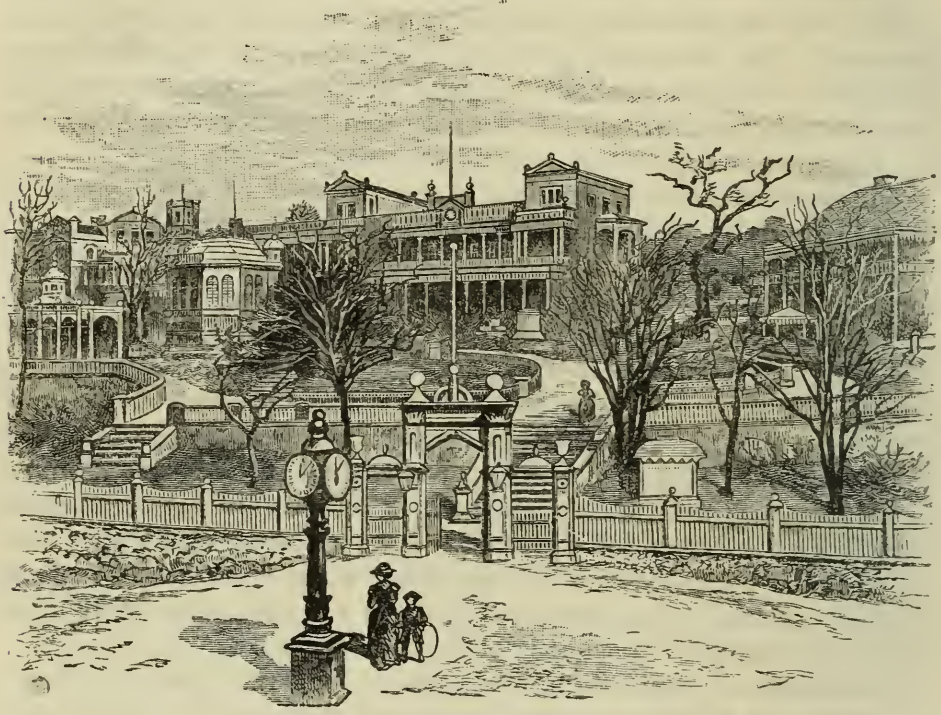
Arrived at our destination, we saw them depart, apparently straight for the Grand Hotel; whilst we, wrapt in a glorious vision of cherries, seen that morning on the way to the steamer, turned in an opposite direction towards the market.

The fruit was there, just as it had appeared some hours ago, the rare cherries still in large supply. The tempters—those Eves of the market—in goodly array, waited for the tempted. A glance round: such as a thief might give at the critical moment, or a fox when he has finally selected his particular fat goose. Fortune favoured the brave. We were alone, might greedily venture upon an extra supply, and revel in them whilst strolling up and down the banks of the canal, between the bridges: a spot ever after known to us as Cherry Walk.

The bewitching eyes of the woman looked straight into ours as she put on twenty öre a pound to the ordinary charge. The scales were groaning under delicious red pyramids, when—Santa Maria!—up streamed from the other end of the market the whole of that American party, walking one behind another like a string of turkeys. They,

too, had evidently seen these same cherries in the early morning, evidently laid plans to be carried out on their return. When they saw the citadel already in possession of the enemy, they stormed. Great was their consternation. "These Swedes positively go in for their own cherries," said one to another. "I think they might leave them for strangers. If we don't interfere they'll buy up the whole store."

E. was spokesman, so our nationality remained unknown, and we departed in triumph for Cherry Walk. In quietness and solitude, yet surrounded on all sides by signs of life: by slowly moving barges and throbbing steamers, forests of masts and forests of houses · we



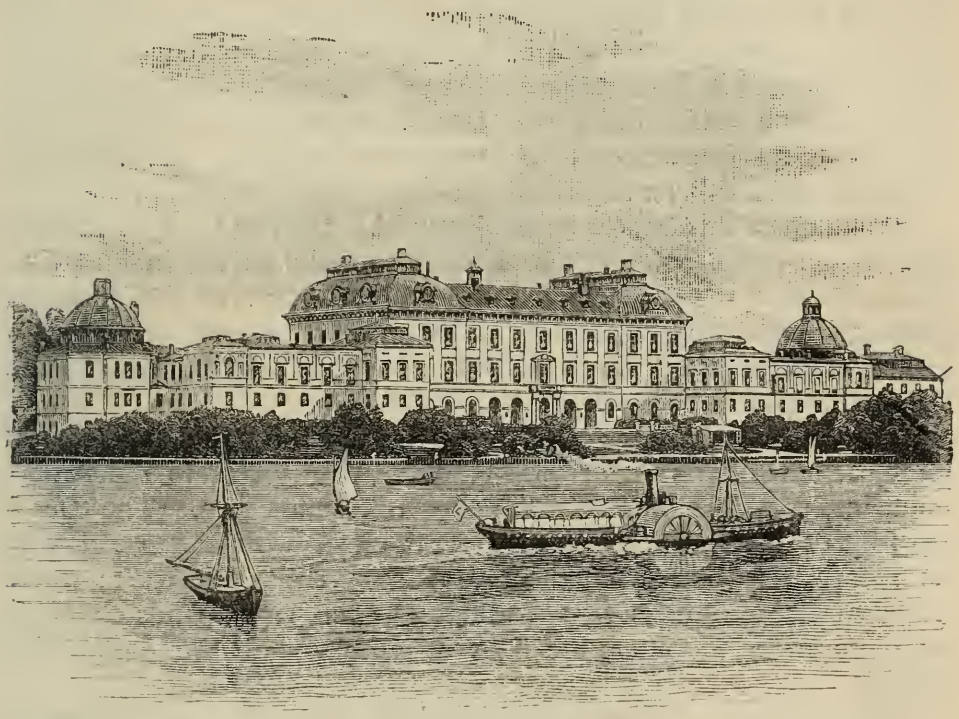
HASSELBACKEN.

feasted like schoolboys on ambrosia; and like schoolboys lamented the end of all good things when the end came. The Americans we saw no more. It was their last day in Stockholm, as we had gathered from their conversation on board. They were on their way to take possession of specially reserved and magnificent state cabins, bound for New York.

We had yet many days before us in Stockholm and in Sweden. The next morning saw us bound for Waxholm, one of the prettiest short excursions in this neighbourhood. The boat started this time in front of the hotel: we had not to encounter the temptations of fruit and flower market. And, by the way, the flowers of Stockholm were of no great beauty or fragrance, and certainly not abundant. Here, at any rate, we realised that we were under Northern skies, not in the sunny South. The gorgeous geranium of Spain, the delicate convol-

wulus of Italy, the sweet rose and violet of the Riviera, seemed unknown to Sweden, or known only in sickly, half-matured specimens.

We started for Waxholm without any noisy Americans, and rather missed them, for they had been as entertaining as a play. Very soon we passed into quiet waters; waters always of the utmost beauty, ever bordered by luxuriant woods and forests. Country houses stood out amid groves of firs; distant castles, built of warm red brick or sandstone, reared their battlemented towers above the waving trees. Now richly wooded banks narrowed the water way; now we passed



DROTTNINGHOLM.

into wide, bay-like stretches. Over all was a soft, warm tone, a clearness and lightness of sky and water, full of singular exhilaration. Stockholm always seemed relaxing, but this atmosphere and influence braced one up like a cup of sparkling wine.

Presently, from a narrow channel, we swept into wider waters, and Waxholm, wonderfully pretty and picturesque, opened up. We had hardly seen anything to equal it. Houses sloped upwards from the water-side, in rows and clusters of bright colour that contrasted well with the green woods and the pale waters of the Baltic. A military castle gave an air of dignity and importance to the little place, once upon a time a fortress of note, that has had to bow down before progress and invention. It is still a very pretty object, and so fulfils a very good purpose. As we approached, a boat was putting off, full of determined looking men and officers, with fierce moustaches and

flashing eyes, and an array of swords and bayonets that ought to have struck terror into the heart of any properly disposed enemy.

We had half an hour to spare, and landed for inspection. Waxholm seemed to consist, for the most part, of one long street of small houses and shops, painted all the colours of the rainbow, looking bright and primitive, "like birds of plumage gay." There was character and individuality about it, whilst in situation it was most romantic. The people all seemed of friendly disposition: looked at you as if you were one of earth's inhabitants, not a visitor from a distant planet come to spy the land. Opposite Waxholm was that broad sheet of water surrounded by wooded undulations of ravishing beauty. You might row across in a few minutes and be lost in wonderful solitudes. And it was certain that by proceeding further up these waters, out towards the wider sea, one would make still more interesting discoveries. The immediate neighbourhoood of Waxholm evidently abounded in charming rural walks and excursions.

But much of this had to be conjectured. Half-an-hour is little to give to any place. Yet was it sufficient to make us fall in love with Waxholm, and regret our fleeting visit. In spite of the frowning fortress, it was distinguished by a pastoral air, a look of repose, a feeling of friendliness, which seemed to say that here one could settle for a while and be at peace.

There are such places: and, since it cannot be the attraction of mind, it must be that of gravitation. One yields to the subtle, influence, confident that it will never turn upon you. The Dead-sea fruit of experience is reserved for contact with the world, with its records of broken friendships, violated faith, lost trust; where mistakes become links forged about our life, riven bonds changing all one's sweet to bitter, the light of happiness to the darkness of despair.

But the face of Nature is faithful to the end. She forges no adamantine chains that will not be sundered. If we become votaries at her shrine, she will give us of her best, draw us unto her by influences holy and soothing, raise the heart heavenwards, change discords to harmony. The ground was cursed for man's sake, but to Nature was left all her divine beauty. Here we are out of reach of man's despoiling hand and power. Mountains have their eternal snows, valleys their laughing waters, and the sea will not stay its waves at any earthly bidding. It all brings one very near the unseen; is almost a raising of the veil. Yea, he who gazes at a summer sunset, may feel, if he pleases, that the very gates of Paradise have opened to him. The vision may fade, the portals roll back, but it has been an experience more elevating and abiding than the visions of all the old mystics, who, with lacerations of the flesh, with vigils and fastings, saw not mercy but sacrifice in their religion.

CASTLES.

In far off days that are no more,
When life and joy went hand in hand,
I used to play beside the shore,
And build upon the sunny sand.
Such lordly structures were upraised
Of pebbles wet with ocean spray;
But often, even while I gazed,
The wavelets washed them all away.

Then childhood faded like a dream,
And youth assumed a sovereign right
To make the mystic future seem
An endless vision of delight.
No longer by the pebbly strand
Rose wall and fort with mimic care;
Instead of on the shifting sand,
I built my castles in the air.

Now youth could give me magic aid,
And tower and turret quickly grew;
And oh! what wondrous scenes we made—
My castles then were fair to view!
With arch and buttress bravely decked
For Fancy is a workman free,
Ah—never was an architect
More skilful and more bold than he.

Anon, when age and I were linked
Together by swift passing years,
These fairy halls grew indistinct—
Or was it that I looked through tears?
For even as the sun's bright rays
Oft die in mist ere day is done,
So, slowly in a gathering haze,
My castles vanished one by one.

Thus youth's sweet promise ends in pain
And earth is still delusive found,
Only that we may form again
A certain hope on surer ground.
If Faith, in place of Fancy, guide,
We need not fear time's rudest shock,
But safely build, whate'er betide,
Upon the Everlasting Rock.

Sydney Grey

AN OXFORD IDYLL.

By the Author of "Nellie's Memories.

THERE are more Cinderellas now-a-days than the world imagines! The old story is enacted under different circumstances, with varying details, in many an English household. The daughters of the land may be fair, but there are too many of them, perhaps, for the anxious manœuvring mother to pilot among the shoals and quicksands of society. Now and then a younger one is kept out in the cold for a little; forbidden to cross the borderland between the school-room and the drawing-room—not exactly forced to sit in ashes, but repressed, hidden away in the dim background. There may be reason, plenty of worldly wisdom in this, and yet the girl-woman is apt to wax rebellious; her sisters' triumphs fill her with envy. All sorts of radiant visions of possible and impossible delights seem to beckon to her from that unknown world. Why must she, poor little Cinderella, waste her sweet bloom unseen and unheeded?

One fears Mabel Templeton had some such thoughts as these as she watched half sadly, half enviously, the progress of her sisters' toilets one bright June forenoon, and also the packing of two well-filled trunks, into each of which Rosalie was depositing a perfectly new and dainty ball dress. For Mr. Templeton had consented to take his two elder daughters to Oxford for the Commemoration; and though there was no mother in this case, Aunt Selina, who was also of the party, had flatly refused to act as chaperon to more than two nieces at a time.

"Disagreeable old thing!" muttered Cinderella, with a curl of her pretty lips. She was trying to brave out her disappointment in this fashion, but tears lay very near the surface, for the poor girl's heart was very sore. "It is such a shame, too, when Owen is my own brother, and I have never seen his rooms, or his cap and gown; and papa took you both last year."

"Yes, but it was not Commemoration time; everything was as slow and stupid as possible," returned Violet, placidly. "Don't be cross, Mab; neither Pauline nor I can help Aunt Selina's fads. You know papa does not like us to cross her, because she is so rich. It was not possible for me to put in a word."

She spoke in a tone of good-natured banter, and patted her young sister's shoulder kindly as she passed.

"Don't Vi!" returned Mab, rather irritably. "It is all very well, your saying that about Aunt Selina, but you know that neither you nor Pauline said one word—you never even mentioned me. And yet Owen begged so hard that I should go this year."

"Oh, Mab! how tiresome you are!" observed Pauline, as Ma paused in her indignant speech. All the Templeton girls were hand-

some ; but though Pauline was very fair and stately, one or two old friends of the family had predicted that Mab would one day bear the palm. "I wish you would not provoke me into saying it, but I must own that I think Aunt is quite right, and three would be too many. It is our turn this year, but next Commemoration, who knows ?"—And here she stopped to survey herself in the glass.

Mabel gave a little stamp with her foot, but she had a sweet nature on the whole, and she wisely resolved not to give vent to the feelings that oppressed her. She was cross, she knew—dreadfully cross—but, oh ! if they only imagined what this disappointment meant to her, how really unhappy she was. But that was just what she could not own to anyone.

Mab had her own little secret, though she was only eighteen, and neither Pauline nor Violet would allow that she was quite grown up. Why, it was only this week that the governess had been dismissed. And she was quite right in her surmise that neither of her sisters wished to include her in their party. It is difficult for a girl to be perfectly honest on all occasions. Mab was hardly telling the truth, that is the whole truth, when she alleged her fondness for Owen and her desire to see him in his undergraduate garb, as her reason for wishing to go to Oxford. Owen was certainly very dear to her, but it may be doubted if someone were not becoming dearer still.

Last vacation Owen had brought a friend home with him, and the two had been a great deal in the school-room, where Mab still did some pretence of lessons with Miss Dalton. Nevertheless, her demure manners in the drawing-room of an evening were as grown-up as Pauline's could be.

What would Mr. Beauchamp think when he saw only Violet and Pauline ?—And yet he had begged her so earnestly to come down for a week.

"You will be out then," he had said, quite eagerly. "Miss Dalton tells me she is to leave in June."

"Oh, yes. I shall be out then. I am quite grown up now," Mab assured him with much naïveté and a little dignity ; but she blushed like a rose over the young man's next words.

"Very well. I shall look for you, and you must give me your first dance at the University ball. I will dance with no one else until you appear. Do not disappoint me. I shall know what to think if I see you. It will show you care a little for my wishes, in spite of all your teasing—for you have teased me sadly, have you not, Miss Mab ?"

But to this Mabel made no sort of rejoinder, except by that blush.

She sat and thought about it all when the carriage had taken them at last to the station, and she was left alone in the sunny, deserted drawing-room. Miss Dalton was gone, all the lesson books were put away, she was a grown-up young lady, as she said. Her time was her own. At the present moment she was mistress of

that great house, and had half-a-dozen servants at her command. When the carriage came back she was at liberty to get into it, and order the coachman to convey her round the park. Her sisters might be shocked, perhaps, at such independence, but then they should not have left her. And yet, in spite of all this freedom and grandeur, no Cinderella sitting among the ashes could have felt more forlorn or miserable.

Owen, dear old fellow, would be bitterly disappointed, for Mab was his special sister; but, as he would be coming back with them, such disappointment would be borne. But what would Mr. Beauchamp think when he saw only her sisters? That she had not cared to come—that his wishes were nothing to her—that she meant only teasing and fun, and nothing else. And all that after all his kindness to her, "the little Faerie Queene," as he had once called her, at a Christmas party.

"Oh, it is too hard! It is bitterly hard!" sobbed the poor child. And though she was not imaginative, at least not more than other happy young girls, a dim, shadowy feeling came over her that it was just some such cross accident as this that had spoiled many an innocent young life, marring its fair beginnings and tangling its golden threads. "And I should not have minded—I should not be half so miserable if I had not teased him so much, and made him look sad," finished Mab, in a little outburst of despair.

And anyone who knew Ned Beauchamp's character would have believed she had cause for her fears. The young man had already gone away, sadly telling himself that Mab did not care for him in the least; that he had laid his honest heart at her feet only to have it trampled upon.

"If she does not come, I shall know what to think," he had said to himself, rather bitterly, when she had bidden him a laughing good-bye. But in all this he wronged her, for Mab was as true and faithful a little soul as ever breathed.

Mabel thought her ill-luck had reached its climax when her Uncle Powell was announced.

None of the girls cared for their Uncle Powell's visits. He was not excessively rich, like their Aunt Selina, from whom they had goodly expectations, so no one expected them to keep him in a good humour; and though he was Mr. Templeton's half brother, no two men could be more unlike. He was a small, wiry man, with a precise, methodical voice, and a manner that was somewhat dry and caustic, and which did not inspire his young relations with much affection, though they certainly had no reason to dislike him, for he was good to them in his own way and according to his lights. Like many other elderly people, his heart was a great deal softer than his words.

He looked at Mab rather sharply as he entered—the little girl's red eyes and pale cheeks did not escape him—but he asked no

questions, leaving Mab to explain rather lamely the reason for her solitude.

"So they have left you all alone," he remarked, curtly. "That is rather dull at your age, eh? Do you mean to allow yourself any dinner, Miss Housekeeper, and do you think you could spare me a little?—for I have been about town all day, and am almost famished."

Mab replied, a little reluctantly, that she would go and see. Oh, yes, she was sure there was enough for both—Pauline was never stingy in her ménage. But as she accomplished her errand, her conscience pricked her for want of ready hospitality.

What if she were unhappy—other people must have their dinners. Uncle Powell was an old man—old, very old, quite fifty-five, and he looked tired—and, in spite of Violet's sarcasms about his old-fashioned whiskers, and the ridiculous cut of his waistcoats, he had always been kind to her, bringing her little presents, and showing her little attentions. He would do it rather awkwardly, and his voice would be a little gruff; but, after all, it is not everyone who has a pleasant manner.

These reflections were so salutary, that Mab tripped upstairs, bathed her aching head with Eau-de-Cologne, put on her fresh white gown, though she had only an old uncle for her vis-à-vis, and putting away her sad thoughts with a brave effort, set herself to entertain the unwelcome guest.

Now, the dinner was very good, and Mr. Templeton's claret was excellent, and Mab made the prettiest little hostess possible, in spite of those tell tale traces on her eyelids; and, as the soft childish eyes raised themselves to his face with that pathetic, pained look in them, something seemed to tug at Uncle Powell's heart-strings.

"You are not quite happy my dear little girl?" he said at last, in the kindest possible voice. "Tell me all about it, Mab."

And then, with some difficulty, he drew the whole story from her; only, of course, the Beauchamp part was suppressed, for there are some things that cannot be told even to the kindest uncle.

The summer twilight was stealing through the room, and Uncle Powell's face was in shadow as he listened to Mab's artless narrative. When she had finished—and he had not interrupted her by a single murmur—he seemed revolving the whole matter carefully in his mind, for it was some minutes before he gave vent to his thoughts.

"Humph! just like your Aunt Selina! A selfish, worldly woman—as I always told Ralph. And pray what harm would it have done her to have taken you as well? I'll be bound Pauline and Violet backed her up in her selfishness—girls are so inconsiderate. I hate such stuck-up doings."

Mab began to cry.

"Never mind, Mab! You shall not spoil your pretty eyes while you have your old Uncle to protect you. You have been a good girl this evening, and you shall not lose your treat. We will do them finely,

Mab, and Owen shall help us. They are at the Randolph you say? —Very well, I will telegraph for rooms at the Mitre. You just go and pack up your fineries, and we will go down by the same train to-morrow."

"Uncle!—oh, Uncle!" Mab could hardly bring out the exclamation, she was so breathless. "Oh, Uncle! what do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say, and say what I mean. And I will come and fetch you to-morrow, as sure as my name is Anthony Powell."

"But, Uncle," stammered poor Mab flushing and paling by turns: "Papa and Pauline—what will they say when they see me? Pauline will be so angry, and Violet will laugh and be sarcastic."

"Let them laugh!" returned Uncle Powell, shortly. "Bless me, Mab!"—a little testily—"I suppose I may give my niece a treat if I like. Your father and I will make all that right, so the women need not interfere. If Pauline speaks to me I shall tell her my mind pretty plainly, so put all this nonsense out of your head. I want to see Oxford and so do you, so we will just have our little trip together."

Mab's only answer to this was to throw her arms round his neck and kiss him, as certainly she had never kissed him in her life. Perhaps Mab's cheek was a little wet. Uncle Powell cleared his throat rather huskily after that, and he even stroked her hair as he bade her good-night.

It was a radiant Mab who was watching for Uncle Powell next morning, as he drove up with his portmanteau. The passengers on the Paddington platform looked half curiously and half admiringly at the bright face peeping out from the pretty shady hat. No little brook purled faster than Mab talked all the way to Oxford.

But she grew more sober when they reached their destination. As no one expected them, there was no one, of course, to meet them at the station. Mab, who was yearning for a sight of Owen's bright, boyish face, felt unreasonably damped at this. And there was a further disappointment in store for her, for when after luncheon they went straight to Magdalen in search of him, the young undergraduate's rooms were empty.

"Oh, I forgot," exclaimed Mab, with a sad droop of her lip; "it is the flower-show at Worcester, and of course he has taken them there."

"Never mind; we will charter a fly and follow them," returned Uncle Powell, briskly, not liking to see the cloud on the girl's face; but she bowed her head disconsolately at this.

"We have no tickets; we should not be admitted; all that has to be arranged beforehand."

And then she said, with an effort, but very sweetly:

"Never mind, dear Uncle, we shall find Owen by and by; and I am glad to see his rooms. How pretty and cosy he has made them! The scout says he is expecting some people to tea. Do you

think," rather timidly, "that we might walk about a little, and come back later on?"

And as Uncle Powell pronounced this an excellent idea, Mab adjusted her hat, and they sauntered out together, turning their steps in the direction of Addison's Walk.

The Templeton girls were not enjoying themselves this afternoon. In the first place, it was rather hot, and Aunt Selina was tired. Then Owen was in one of his sulky moods, and had not offered to introduce any of his friends. He had turned rusty from the moment that he had met them at the station and found Mab was not with them.

"What a shame, leaving that poor little thing alone at home!" he had blurted out. "I call that confoundedly hard of you women!"

"Hush! Aunt Selina will hear you!" remonstrated Violet, rather alarmed at this tragical vehemence.

"I don't care who hears me!" retorted Owen. "That is so like you girls. You are always putting on Mab, just because you know you cannot either of you hold a candle to her!" Which was rude, to say the least of it; but then brothers will be rude sometimes, in spite of Oxford training.

To add to their discomfiture, Ned Beauchamp had come up to them a little eagerly, and had at once questioned them about Mab.

"I don't see your sister, but she is here, of course," trying to speak as if the question were of no moment to him, but flushing over his words like a girl; but Pauline, who was too self-absorbed to be observant, returned, quite carelessly:

"Mab is at home at Porchester Terrace; there was no thought of her coming. What a curious orchid, Mr. Beauchamp: I have never seen one like that before."

Ned Beauchamp looked at the orchid and said a civil word or two, and then he detached himself from the party with a muttered excuse: he had only just come to show himself; it was awfully hot; he must go back and work.

"Halloa! why is Ned Beauchamp taking himself off?" exclaimed Mr. Templeton, in surprise, as he joined his eldest daughter; but Pauline only shrugged her shoulders and looked amazed.

"I don't know, papa; he seems to be a little odd and bearish to-day! He used to be pleasant enough when he stayed at Porchester Terrace; but young men will give themselves airs sometimes."

"And so will young ladies, my dear," returned her father, rather maliciously. "Well, well, young people must manage their own affairs. Anyhow, Ned Beauchamp is a capital fellow, and worth a little trouble. Why, he has fifteen hundred a year of his own now, and when his uncle dies he will have as much again. So you and Violet had better do your best," continued Mr. Templeton, with the heavy raillery with which certain men of a coarse calibre love to indulge.

When Ned Beauchamp had made that excuse about his work, he had lost himself at once amongst the crowd near the entrance gate. Flowers were all very well, but he had no longer any heart for them. Mab had played him false.

People looked after the tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, with his handsome, moody face, and many would have greeted him, but he looked neither to the right nor left. There was a dull, heavy pain in his heart, a sense of humiliation and defeat that was driving him nearly wild. A sweet, girlish face had bewitched him; he was ready to give all he had in the world—not only his money, but himself and his honest, manly heart—to this girl, and she wanted none of it. She had promised him to come—at least, if silence gives consent—and now she had played him false; his wishes were nothing to her; he had told her he should know what to think. Well, he knew what to think now!

So the foolish young fellow argued with himself, never dreaming in his man's philosophy that possibly there might be another side to all this.

He had reached Magdalen Cloisters by this time, but the thought of work was odious to him, so he turned through the inner gate into the shadowy coolness of Addison's Walk.

It had never looked so deliciously inviting as it did this afternoon. The deer were clustered in a shady nook in the park, the birds were twittering overhead, quite lost among the green leaves; the golden sunlight quivered through the thick foliage; the long vista seemed to stretch endlessly before him, like love and youth, merging into a sunshiny horizon; everywhere green leaves, bird-music, sparkles of sunlight, and the clear summer blue of heaven above all.

The walk seemed strangely empty this afternoon. Ned had only passed one person—a thick-set, grey-haired man, who was poking his stick among the periwinkles, and took no notice of him. A little farther on there was a bench, with a girl sitting on it in a grey dress, and a hat with daffodils; but Ned was in no mood for curiosity, so he never turned his head. Only as he passed the girl started up, and called to him in an eager voice.

"Oh, please stop, Mr. Beauchamp! We want to know where Owen is. And—and—I beg your pardon for startling you so; but you need not have passed me."

Mab was stammering sadly in her confusion, but it was the sudden look of joy in Ned's eyes that made her trip over her words. And why had he caught hold of her hands in that quick, excited way?

"Oh, Mab, is it really you! And why did your sister say you had not come? I thought you had played me false. I thought—oh! I cannot tell you how mad and unhappy I felt—and you were here all the time, my darling."

Well, it was good of Uncle Powell to stand with his back to them so long, feeling among the periwinkle leaves, when they had so much to tell each other. Mab cried again a little as she poured her story

into Ned's ear—her despair when they had driven away and left her —her sorrow at having teased him—her terror lest he should have misconstrued her absence—the beneficent comforter in the person of Uncle Powell.

"Never mind, my Faerie Queene," Ned had said, comforting her. "I should soon have learned the truth, for I had just made up my mind to ask for leave, and run up to Porchester Terrace. I know it would not have been right in your father's absence, but I could not have rested without hearing from your own lips why you had not come. You would not have been long unhappy, but now it is much better as it is. But here comes your uncle, and I must thank him for bringing you, and then we must go in search of Owen."

There was a weary and somewhat silent little party in Owen's rooms. Mr. Templeton was yawning visibly, and Aunt Selina was cross. Pauline and Violet looked bored and a little offended. Owen had asked none of his friends to meet them; he was taking no trouble to amuse them.

"I asked Beauchamp—confound the fellow, I wonder why he does not turn up," retorted Owen, rather irritably.

"There, I think I hear him now—there are certainly footsteps," observed Violet, willing to mollify her brother—and Pauline smoothed her brow. Yes, there were footsteps. Ned's face appeared at the door, smiling and radiant.

"Owen, old fellow, I have brought you some visitors," he said, joyously: and at that moment a little figure in a grey dress darted forward, and rushed up to the astonished Owen.

"I have come, dear. Uncle Powell has brought me. Oh, my dear Owen, are you not glad to have me—Papa and Pauline, and—ah—Violet, too." And here Mab confronted them, half shyly and half laughing.—"Oh, please, do not be angry, anybody!" throwing out her hands with a pretty appealing gesture for mercy.

One of them was at once taken and held fast by Ned.

"No one shall be angry with you, Mab, while I am here," observed this very audacious young man. "Owen, tell your sister she is welcome, and Mr. Powell will explain all the rest."

And so he did, to Mab and her father's entire satisfaction.

Rosa Nouchette Carey.

CAROLINE HEATH.

THE sun was setting in a glory of gold and purple. Caroline Heath glanced out at the kitchen window before which she stood washing-up the cups and plates which had come out from tea. She sighed unconsciously. Dimly and vaguely she was sensible of wishing that some things in this world had not been ordered just as they were. There was so much debasing work to be done, so little time for refined ease, for doing just what she should like to do. Take the present moment. If she could only go out to watch the gorgeous splendour of the sky before the crimson and gold and purple faded away into grey, and indulge in elevating thoughts, and draw pictures of an ideal life.

But she could not. She had these depressing tea-things to wash and put away, and to leave the kitchen generally straight; then she had to turn the beds down upstairs; and, that done, she must look after Joan, the servant, and see that she did her work properly, for she was not to be trusted.

Caroline put back a lock of soft brown hair that was straying on her forehead; her eyes were hazel with a rather sad, soft expression in them; her features were delicate. The dress she wore was pretty enough, but only of cotton, and the sleeves were turned back at the wrists. A saddened life imparts its traces upon the countenance; and Caroline Heath's life had been sad for three or four years now.

A lad of fourteen dashed boisterously into the kitchen, swinging a white lily in his hand. "Make haste over your cups and saucers, Carry," said he. "I see John Arkright coming across the rye-field."

No increase of colour heightened the pink bloom of her cheeks, though John Arkright was her lover; soon, people said, to be her husband.

"Where did you find that lovely lily, Tom?"

"Down by the brook," answered the boy, who was at home for the midsummer holidays. "I brought it for you, Carry. Put it in your hair."

"Nonsense, lad."

"It's not nonsense. A girl ought to dress for her sweetheart," he went on with comic seriousness. "Emma Williams wears flowers in her hair."

"Emma Williams is the Squire's daughter. She has not to work all day, or to see that others work."

"Carry," said the young fellow, sitting down on a low stool and staring up at her: "don't you wish Mrs. H. was hanged?"

"Hush, Tom!"

"Well, I do; a hundred times a day. Here"—getting up—"I

shall put it in your hair all the same ; you've as much right to wear flowers as Emma Williams has. Keep still now."

His sister laughed a little, but bent her head. The lily was quite in accordance with the smooth, bright hair and the pretty girlish face, but not with the print dress.

"There, it looks—divine," cried Tom, having arranged it to his satisfaction. "Mind you don't take it out again."

He vaulted off. Caroline finished what she had to do in the kitchen, and went into the front garden. Her father and Mr. Arkright were standing together at the side rails, looking across the fold-yard of the farm to the land beyond. Caroline walked slowly towards them and John Arkright turned to shake hands with her.

"Yes," said he to Mr. Heath, continuing what he was saying, "crops never looked more promising. Only let us have fine weather for another month or two, and we shall have a splendid harvest."

"He can never talk of anything but his crops and his farm," was the thought that rose involuntarily to Caroline's mind as she took up her station beside them.

The picture was one of rural plenty. The sweet odour of new mown hay came from the meadows which were cut ; wheat, barley, rye, grew in other fields ; in the fold-yard stood the cows being milked by Hodge and Joan ; Joan's tongue full of reproach on account of the lateness of the hour, Hodge excusing himself by saying he had been kept helping in the hayfields. At an open window of the house sat Mrs. Heath attired in costly silk and doing some foolish fancy work. Just then Tom ran up to them, the great dog, Rover, jumping about him.

Mr. Heath took his arms off the railings. He was a spare man, attired in white fustian with breeches and gaiters ; his face was good-natured but weak.

"I must step over to the farrier's," said he ; "he must come again to the brown cob."

He walked slowly through the garden to the front gate, which skirted the high road. This rustic place, Briarly, had few dwellings in it, farmhouses or labourers' cottages, and its inhabitants were homely and simple-mannered.

The only fine lady in it, apart from Squire Williams's ladies, was Mrs. Heath. She was Mr. Heath's second wife, and still under thirty. When she came home to Briar Farm, four years ago, she found a staid old working housekeeper in it, and Joan, the rough maid-of-all-work : Caroline and Tom were at school. Mrs. Heath did not get on well with the housekeeper and discharged her, replacing her with a genteel maid from Norton. The maid in her turn did not get on well with the work ; proved to be as fine and useless as her mistress. After a time of discomfort such as Briar Farm had never before known, Mrs. Heath issued her veto that Caroline must come home and see to things. She was mistress and master, ruling her weak, placid

husband with an iron will; and he dared not say nay. In fact it was time that Caroline did come home, for she was in her eighteenth year, and would have come before but for the new wife. So Caroline took the management of things; it was so decreed by her stepmother, and she soon found that she had to take a great deal of the work also.

She had been doing it for three years, and was now twenty-one. Lines of care had gradually settled around her sweet, tender mouth; but she kept her own secrets and never complained, never spoke of her disappointed feelings, her crushed hopes; what she suffered, she suffered in silence.

Six months ago, at the beginning of the year, her father had spoken to her. She remembered it well; it was the day that Tom had gone back to school, and Mrs. Heath was off to Norton, and she and her father were alone at the tea-table.

"Carry," he suddenly said, helping himself to some thin bread-and-butter, "how do you like John Arkright?"

"Oh, I like him very well, papa," she answered, carelessly.

"That's all right, then; he wants to pay his addresses to you," said Mr. Heath.

Caroline gazed at the speaker in surprise. "To pay his addresses to me!" she repeated. "Why, papa, he is ever so old."

"*Old!*" cried Mr. Heath. "He is only thirty-two this year. A fine young man, Caroline, with a good farm at his back, and plenty of substance. Don't take up wrong fancies, my dear."

Caroline was fishing a tiny lump of sugar out of the basin to add to the sweetness of her second cup of tea. She did not answer. A thought had come flashing into her mind. "By marrying him I should get away from here, and escape drudgery."

"You should remember, child, that a proposal of marriage from a man like Arkright is not to be met with every day," said her father. "Many a girl in the neighbourhood would jump at him."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, papa, I will think of it."

And that was how she became engaged to John Arkright after thinking of it for a day. She respected him, but did not love him. Moreover, she had gradually awakened to the conviction that when she did marry her life of work would not be changed, but only the scene of it. His mother, who at present lived with him, worked as hard as she did; his sister, Bessy, had done so till she married; it was the custom with most of the farmers' households down there. John Arkright was well off; could have kept a managing housekeeper, and allowed his wife ease and rest; but such a revolution in the state of affairs had never entered into his calculation. Thus matters stood at the present time. Caroline was engaged to be John Arkright's wife, and he had no notion that the prospect, to her, did not look as bright as if adorned with June roses.

"How smart you have made yourself!" cried Mr. Arkright, as they drew close to the front gate.

"Smart!" exclaimed Caroline. "Oh—this," she added, laughing, suddenly remembering the lily in her hair: "Tom put it there."

Mr. Heath glanced at the lily, which he had not noticed before. "Pretty things, those lilies," he remarked, "so sweet and pure."

A rumble of wheels, in the distance, gave token that the stage coach, which brought passengers from a distant railway town, was approaching. Mr. Heath put his arms upon the low iron gate to watch it pass; Caroline stood by him.

It was coming slowly up the hill, and appeared to be unusually crowded with passengers and luggage.

"What a load!" exclaimed John Arkright.

"Oh, I know," quickly spoke Tom. "It is bringing the engineers who are to lay out the new line of railroad. Dick Williams told me they were coming this evening. Rooms are taken for them at the Golden Lion, at Norton."

The coach came slowly on, and drew up close before Mr. Heath's gate, perhaps rather to his surprise. A gentleman and lady, elderly people, inside passengers, got out of it, and the guard began to take some luggage from the boot.

"Is this the Grange, sir?" the lady asked, approaching Mr. Heath.

"No, ma'am. This is Briar Farm."

"Dear me! Walter, we have got down at the wrong place. How stupid that driver must be. I heard you distinctly tell him 'Mr. Williams's, the Grange.'"

"All right, ma'am," said the driver, who had listened to the words with equanimity. "This spot's the nearest to it."

"You must take this lane close by; a few minutes' walk will bring you to the Grange," spoke Mr. Heath.

"Good gracious! Walk!" cried the lady. "And what's to become of the luggage? Walter, what *are* we to do?"

"The luggage must stay here till Williams can send a man for it, Jane; the guard says it will be safe."

"Quite safe," repeated Mr. Heath, in compassion to the lady's consternation. "We will give a look to it, if you like, ma'am."

"Oh, if you would be so kind, sir. I've three new dresses and two lovely bonnets in that further box."

During this colloquy, one of the outside passengers, who sat on the side of the coach nearest the gate, had never once taken his eyes off the pretty girl who stood with the white lily in her hair. Laughing blue eyes they were, set rather deeply in a good-looking face, much bronzed, as if its owner were a good deal in the open air.

"Can you tell me how far we are off Norton?" he suddenly said to Mr. Heath, in courteous and refined tones.

"Nearly two miles," replied the farmer.

"Thank you. This seems to be a charming neighbourhood."

"It is, sir."

The guard, having stacked the luggage on the pathway, was mounting to his perch behind; the coachman touched up his horses, and the old-fashioned stage rolled along on its way; the passenger who had spoken taking off his hat in parting salutation, meant probably for the young lady who wore the lily.

The stage coach went onwards and was soon lost to sight; the guests for Squire Williams disappeared up the lane, fragrant with the wild roses and honeysuckle in its hedges. Farmer Heath crossed the road on his way to the farrier's; Caroline remained leaning on the gate.

"By George, wasn't that a handsome fellow!" ejaculated Tom. "He's the engineer-in-chief, I'll lay. Did you notice him, Carry?"

She did not answer; perhaps did not hear. In that man's eyes she had recognised something of a kindred spirit to her own, and a feeling was stealing over her of the glowing possibilities which might have been in her life. If she could only meet them—only be emancipated from this dull, dreary existence and go out to find them. Ah, it was a sad world.

"What nice blue eyes he had," went on Tom. "He was looking at you, Carry, all the time. It was the lily did that. Oh yes, he's the chief of 'em."

"What have blue eyes to do with engineering?" inquired Mr. Arkright.

"A great deal when they are set in such a fine fellow as that," laughed Tom, as he passed through the gate with Rover.

"Will you not put on your hat and come out for a walk, Caroline?" said her lover.

The crimson was slowly fading out of her cheek, called to it by Tom's remark about the stranger looking at her. She turned round.

"I should like to go very much; a walk would be pleasant this lovely evening, but I have not time. I have things to see to yet, and I feel very tired."

"Tired?"

"Yes, I have been hard at work all day, one way or another."

She walked across to a rustic seat under a tree, and sat down; it was out of sight of the gate; Mr. Arkright slowly followed, and took a seat on the same bench. It was a lovely sky.

"Caroline, when are we to be married?"

The question sounded so abrupt, for she had been thinking of anything rather than that, that she started and coloured painfully. He had placed his hands on his knees, bending a little forward to look into her face, and thus awaited the answer.

"I do not know; I have not thought about it," she said, hesitating uncomfortably. "Not yet."

"Not yet?—but why not? What do you mean? It is close upon six months now that I have been waiting for you."

"I mean that I—would rather not think about it yet. Please don't ask me to, Mr. Arkright."

"But I must ask you; don't be unreasonable. I did think of asking you to let it be before harvest; but that's such a busy time with us it might be best for mother to stop on till it's over; she knows the work and is used to it. You'd hardly be able to do as much as she does at first, and I don't mean to go to the expense of another house girl," he added, holding out his hand to Rover, then trotting along the path.

"So mother has fixed to leave me after harvest," he continued, for Caroline did not speak. "And right sadly we shall miss her. She is fifty-five next October, and as active as she was at five-and-thirty. She'll be sorry to go too; a life of ease and idleness, such as she'll lead at Bessy's, won't suit her, she says, after her busy life. I question whether you'll ever make the bustling, capable woman that my mother has been, Caroline."

Caroline pressed her hand to her eyes and forehead to press back the blinding pain gathered there. Never until this moment had she fully realised the living death upon which she would enter when she became John Arkright's wife.

"But do not think I am dissatisfied, or wish to grumble, Caroline," resumed Mr. Arkright. "I am quite pleased to take you as you are; and you'll learn experience with every year as it passes."

"Are you sure you care for me very much, John?" she rejoined, in a low, confidential tone, some wild wish of asking him to emancipate her if he did not surging up in her heart.

"Why, of course I do; there's nobody else I care for," he answered, in some surprise. "Is it because I walked out of church on Sunday afternoon with Martha Brand and her brothers, and then stayed tea with them up at their farm, that you ask? You are not jealous of her, are you, Caroline?"

"Oh, no, I am not jealous; of her, or of anyone," murmured the girl. "She would make you a rare good wife, John; better than ——"

"Who would? Martha Brand? Well, perhaps so, if you were not in the way," he added, in the matter-of-fact tone which distinguished all he said; "she's got her head on her shoulders the right way. But I chose you, Caroline; and, my dear, I hope you will come home to me at the turn of harvest."

He rose from the bench, said a few words to Tom, who had come strolling up, shook hands with Caroline and wished her good evening. She watched him away; he was honest, well-meaning, good-hearted, even generous; but Caroline knew that as his wife she would have no interests, no aspirations beyond the rearing of poultry, the making of butter and cheese, the management of a farmhouse generally: and her heart fainted within her.

Caroline's sleep that night was troubled, and she rose in the

morning unrefreshed. The day was lowering, sultry, intensely oppressive. Never had the work seemed so unpalatable, or so hard to get through. In the afternoon, when she was picking roses in the front garden—sent to do so by Mrs. Heath, who was expecting some friends to tea—the garden-gate opened and footsteps came up the path. Stepping out from the bushes, Caroline found herself face to face with the handsome young man who had spoken from the top of the coach, with the very self-same laughing blue eyes close to her own.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger. "This is Mr. Heath's, I believe. Can I see him?"

"He is not at home just now," she replied. "Mrs. Heath is. Will she do?"

"Well—perhaps," he answered, doubtingly, as he took a card from his pocket. "Will you kindly let it be taken to her?—What lovely roses!"

Caroline took the card with the hand which had no roses in it, and carried it to the sitting-room; a pretty room, its window opening to the ground and looking to the grass plat. Mrs. Heath sat near it, working an antimacassar in red and white wools. She was a little woman, fair and frivolous.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, reading the card. "'Mr. George Rochester.' It makes me think of the man in Jane Eyre. Show him in, Caroline; why on earth did you not do so at once?"

He came in; his gentlemanly appearance, well-bred manners, and good looks bespeaking for him a gracious reception. Mrs. Heath, who had been used to society and had really lowered herself by marrying a farmer, recognised his superiority at once.

Taking the chair offered him, Mr. Rochester explained his business. Of the little body of engineers who had come down he was the head and chief. Tom Heath was right in that conjecture. He had now called to ask leave to erect a tent for tools and other purposes on one of Mr. Heath's fields, which overlooked the line to be made—would Mr. Heath give that leave?

"It will not damage the ground in the least, and will be quite a temporary accommodation," he explained. "Mr. Williams—Squire Williams, I believe you call him down here—has allowed us to do the same thing on his land, and the tent is now being put up there."

"Oh, I feel sure Mr. Heath will not think of objecting; but, perhaps he had better be spoken to," said the wife. "Caroline, you can go and ask your papa; he is sure to be with the haymakers in the three-acre field."

"I think I had better go to Mr. Heath myself; and perhaps this young lady will show me the way," said Mr. Rochester.

He bowed over his hat to Mrs. Heath and left her presence. Caroline conducted him out by a little gate which opened direct on to the meadows.

"Some rural places are detestable and some are charming; this is the latter," he remarked, as they went along. "It looked so green and cool here last evening, after the hot railway journey and the dusty coach drive afterwards, that I nearly wished to set up a permanent tent in the place instead of a temporary one."

"It is a very pleasant spot," answered Caroline.

"I like the scenery," he continued, looking at the broad stretch of green plains and rising corn, intersected by groves of trees, by the winding river, all bounded by a purple-brown line of distant hills rising against the azure sky. "Have you always lived here?"

"Except when I have been away at school."

"Your name, I think, is Caroline Heath."

He looked at her as he spoke, half smiling. Caroline was surprised. "How did you know my name?" she asked.

"Ah! did you think the little birds of the air whispered it? I heard it just now at Squire Williams's; his daughter told it me."

Caroline smiled too. "But why should she tell it? Do you know the Williamses?"

"I did not know them, or anyone else here, until to-day. Calling to put the same request to the Squire which I am about to put to your father, I found that the lady and gentleman the coach put down last night are a Captain and Mrs. Dennet, acquaintances of my mother's. We all fell into conversation. Upon my remarking that I must come on here to ask leave about the tent, Mrs. Dennet said that a very pretty girl was standing at the gate here last evening who wore a lily in her hair. Miss Williams then said it must have been Caroline Heath. That is how I know your name."

The girl's face had never before had so many blushes on it. "Do you read much?" he inquired, presently.

"No, I wish I did. I have no time for it; I have to work."

The unconscious pathos in her voice touched Mr. Rochester. "I bought a book coming down yesterday; it is a cheap edition of Lytton Bulwer's 'Eugene Aram.' I will bring it to you if you like it."

"Oh, yes, I should like it; but please do not bring it. I cannot tell how long it would be before I could read it through and return it to you."

"You need not do that; I have quite done with the book, and you are heartily welcome to it. I have a small edition of Longfellow's poems with me; I will bring that also."

"You are too good," murmured Caroline.

When they reached the three-acre field Caroline pointed out her father, who was overlooking the haymakers, and returned home alone. The next day a small parcel reached her, given into Tom's hands by Mr. Rochester, containing the two books.

Haymaking went on in the glowing summer weather. The tents were up at the various standing points, and the new railway was

oeginning its work. Mr. Rochester was seen everywhere; he seemed to be almost ubiquitous; and Caroline Heath was often meeting him, indoors or out. If by chance they met near one of the hayfields, he and she would turn and make hay together. Sometimes he would drop in to Mrs. Heath's tea-table to discuss fashionable topics with the lady, scraps of news from the great world, or political prospects as touching upon agricultural interests with the farmer. And now and again he would be walking in the shady lanes with Caroline under the moonlight.

The result was this: long before the harvest was gathered, or the line of rail had made much progress to the uninitiated eye, Caroline's heart had gone out for good and all to this attractive man. She loved him with a pure, passionate, ardent love, which would abide within her for ever.

And he—what of his heart? About that there was less certainty. He kept his own feelings well in hand, and made no sign.

One Sunday, when the Heaths had been attending service, Mr. Arkright walked with them home from church and was invited to remain for tea. Caroline wished she could make an excuse to stay away from the parlour—in her own room—in the kitchen—anywhere. Latterly, whenever she had thought of marrying him she was conscious of a vague rush of pain, which turned her cold and almost seemed to blind her.

After tea Mrs. Heath went out to pay a visit at a neighbour's house; the farmer strolled into the garden, lighted his pipe, and sat down in the arbour; Caroline and her stolid lover were alone. Tom had long ago gone back to school.

"Will you walk with me up home, Caroline?" he asked. "Mother's all by herself; she'd like to see us."

A shiver took Caroline, which she concealed by leaving her chair at the table and leaning out at the open window.

"I think I'd rather not go out this evening," she said; "my head aches."

"That's bad; you've had a headache often lately," returned unsuspicious Mr. Arkright; "a walk might do you good."

"Oh, no; it would make it worse. I feel so tired."

"I wonder what's the cause? A young girl like you has no business with headaches, or to feel tired either."

"It is the hard, incessant work I have to do," said Caroline, incautiously.

"Hard work! Incessant! Why what do you mean, Caroline?" he said, full of surprise.

"Day in, day out, it's always the same—work, work, work! There's never any ending to it."

"Well, I don't know what you can be talking of. The work in this house isn't much; it's child's play compared with the work up at my place."

"Yes," she said, faintly; "I suppose it is."

"But you'll soon get into it. Caroline, I want you to fix the day. The harvest will soon be over, and we must be married at the end of it."

A swift horror came upon her. The setting sun seemed to darken. She reeled as she stood, as one smitten with a blow. Well, she must tell him. *Could* she tell him? She must, she must, she *must*. Now, or never.

"John," she said, putting one hand up to her brow to push back the hair, and leaning for support against the side of the window frame, "I—I am afraid I should not be able to do the work at your farm; I'm not strong enough for it."

"Eh?" cried he, staring in amazement. "What do you mean by that, Caroline? You are as strong as you ever were. Is it the will that's wanting?"

"Perhaps it is," she answered, with a desperate courage. "I hate the thought of it with a bitter hatred."

In all John Arkright's placid-going and stolid life, he had never been so taken-to as now; never felt so much at sea.

"Do you mean you would not *do* the work?"

"I mean I could not. I could not undertake to enter upon it. If I did, it would kill me."

He was sitting in a large chair and he leaned back in it, his hands grasping its elbows as he stared at Caroline. This was altogether a new experience.

"But what is to be done then?" he said, presently. "The wife I marry must be able to work and to manage."

"I'm sure I could not. It had better not be me. John, don't you see it will be to your interest to choose somebody else. If you would but think of Martha Brand?"

"Well, this is a queer start—if you are not saying it in joke," cried the bewildered man.

"I have seen for some time, John, that we were not suited to one another; it has distressed and troubled me," she said in a low tone. "I hate the life of farm-house drudgery which I am compelled to lead here; rather than lead it always I would pray to die. Do have compassion on me, John, and take Martha Brand."

"But I like you best."

"Oh, John, you are kind. Have pity upon me!"

"What would folks say?" cried John.

"Anything they liked. Let them. Martha's a good girl, John; pretty too, and the best of managers. I'm sure she'd have you."

"I daresay she would if I asked her. Time enough to think of that. One can't put off wives and take on others at a moment's notice."

"But you will release me? You will forgive me?"

"What else can I do?" he retorted, helplessly. "When you tell

me that the work up at my place would kill you, you don't leave me much choice."

"We do not make ourselves, remember, and are not responsible for our tastes and distastes. I thank you gratefully, John. We will be the best of friends always, but nothing more. It is settled then?"

"I expect so. Be sure of one thing—I would never marry an unwilling woman. Yes, it's settled."

The great and overwhelming sense of relief which had stolen over Caroline kept her silent. How grateful she was to him for the quiet and reasonable way in which he had met the offered slight, heaven only knew. It was as if a glorious dawn had replaced a dark and interminable night.

And in her meetings and her walks with George Rochester there now lay no pricking of conscience.

II.

One evening close upon September, when the lovely hues of sunset last far into the gloaming, and the late birds carol forth their evening chant, Caroline Heath was walking down the winding lane from the house of Squire Williams, when she found herself overtaken by Mr. Rochester. On the left a brook meandered silently along at the foot of a grove of trees; involuntarily, as it seemed, both turned towards it. There was a path amidst the trees which equally led to the high road. Mr. Rochester spoke abruptly.

"Will you forgive me, Caroline, if I ask you what you may deem an impertinent question?"

"I do not think you could be impertinent," she answered, softly.

"Thank you; not willingly. Is it true that you were engaged to Arkright, of the Glebe Farm, and is the engagement now at an end?"

Caroline coloured painfully. "How did you know anything about it?" she said.

"I heard the rumour yesterday. Is it so?"

"It is true I was engaged to him. It was a sort of—of—business engagement," she strove to explain; "that is, he and my father settled it between them. When I found how impossible it was that I could—could—like the prospect, I asked Mr. Arkright to release me, and he did so. He behaved very kindly over it."

He looked down at her changing countenance. It was not the rosy light of sunset that made it so lovely, for that was lost in grey clouds.

All in a moment, without notice, he drew her to his side and kissed her passionately.

"My dearest love!" he whispered; "my darling Caroline!"

He released her instantly, saying no more. But, after that, life wore a new aspect for Caroline Heath.

They lasted for a fortnight, and then the shadow fell. There came down to Norton, which was an inland watering place of gay resort, some ladies of fashion, including Mr. Rochester's mother and his cousin, Grace Ormby. Mr. Rochester did not, whether by chance or design, mention this to Caroline. She knew vaguely, by some remark of her step-mother, that a party of gay ladies from town were staying at the Golden Lion, which was the chief hotel of the place, and that they had become friendly with the family at the Grange, but she knew no more.

One afternoon, however, when Caroline had gone to the Grange by invitation, and was in the drawing-room with Emma Williams and her mother, a carriage was seen driving in at the gates, and presently a servant announced the visitor :—

"Lady Rochester."

The name startled Caroline. Could the elegant woman, now entering in her silks and laces, her title preceding her, be at all connected with her lover, George Rochester? Surely not. It might be only a coincidence in names.

Lady Rochester shook hands with Mrs. Williams and Emma, and glanced at the pretty girl, in the simple frock, who stood up in honour of her entrance. But Caroline was not introduced. It might please Emma Williams to be friendly with her as a neighbour, but Farmer Heath's daughter, she thought, was not one to be presented to Lady Rochester.

Caroline resumed the work she had been busy on with Emma—some intricate mystery of silks and beads on crimson satin. Emma went to sit near her mother, and joined in the conversation.

Lady Rochester exclaimed at the sweet scent of the mignonette, which came through the windows, open to the ground. She said it was her favourite perfume of all perfumes. Upon which Mrs. Williams made her daughter go out and cut some.

"Will you come with me, Caroline," whispered Emma, as she went to the little work-table for the scissors, and the two girls went out together.

"I suppose that lady is no relation to Mr. Rochester; but the name's the same," remarked Caroline, as they bent over the bed of mignonette.

"No relation! Why, she is his mother," answered Emma.

"His mother!" exclaimed Caroline, as she rose and straightened herself.

"To be sure. Why should she not be? You look as if it amazed you, Caroline."

"But then—he must be—great and grand, different from what we have supposed him—the son of Lady Rochester!" cried Caroline —thought and speech somewhat bewildered.

Miss Williams laughed. "How silly you are, Carry. 'Great and grand!' We have always known who he is; anyone can see that he's a gentleman. His late father, John Rochester, brought some important engineering project to a successful issue, was knighted for it, and became Sir John. I daresay George, in his turn, will be Sir George some day."

"And he can stoop to woo *me!*" thought the dismayed girl, as she bent over the bed again. "*Does* he, though? or has it been all play?"

"He is engaged to his cousin, Grace Ormby," tranquilly ran on Emma, who had not the least notion how the land lay in the other quarter.

A dart, as of a poisoned arrow, seemed to be making havoc of Caroline Heath's heart. She moved a little further away to hide her face. It was pallid as death.

"Is the engagement a recent one?" she asked, when she could command her voice to indifference.

"Not at all. Lady Rochester was talking of it the last time she called here. Grace Ormby has a large fortune. Mr. George is wise enough to see on which side his bread is buttered, and goes in for his cousin. He may be in love with her for aught I know to the contrary; she is a handsome girl, and would be a nice girl but for her pride. We have cut enough, I'm sure, Caroline; let us take it in."

After that day, and its rude awakening, matters seemed to have changed. It was as if a crisis had come and stopped things. Whether Caroline in her bitter hopelessness avoided Mr. Rochester, or that he spent his leisure time with his mother and her friends, certain it was that there were no more stolen meetings.

The weather continued to be hot and lovely; it had been a glorious summer; and though September was now in, the sunny sky might have been that of August. During this time Squire and Mrs. Williams gave an afternoon party—sports and dancing on the lawn, perpetual refreshments indoors, a crowd of gay people, gay voices, and gay attire. Amid the guests were Mrs. Heath and her step-daughter.

Caroline went to it in inward tumult, dragging with her her aching heart. She wore a white, fresh, unpretending dress, with ribbons of the palest pink, and a straw hat wreathed with small wild roses. She was by far the prettiest girl there, the quietest, most retiring, most modest; and the handsomest and most imposing, in her dainty robes of lace and blue silk, was Miss Ormby.

Caroline regarded her from a distance, and could not withdraw her fascinated gaze. To her jealous eyes Grace had all the bewitching beauty of an enchanted princess; her golden hair scintillated in the sunlight, her dark blue eyes were proudly beautiful. Now she was standing the centre of a host of worshippers, and now she was accepting an ice which one of them offered, and now she

was dancing with George Rochester. They seemed to be very, very intimate, she and he, and Caroline's heart grew sick and cold. Next she saw him dancing with Emma Williams; but he did not come to ask *her*.

Only once during all that bitter afternoon, did he approach Caroline in converse; and then he entered upon ordinary topics—the gay scene before them, the superb weather, and so on.

"We have not seen much of you the last week or so," she took courage at length to say; and only herself knew what effort it cost her to speak calmly.

"I have been very busy," he answered. "Now that the line is progressing it takes up more of my attention than it took at first, and while my mother is here she claims from me most of my leisure time."

"Of course; I understand that," said Caroline.

But not a word had he said of regret; not a hint given that in time their former intercourse should be renewed. At that moment Miss Ormby crossed the lawn with Emma Williams.

"That is your cousin, I think?" said Caroline.

"Yes, that's Grace," he assented. "She ——"

Mrs. Heath came back to her seat then from the refreshment room, and he did not finish his sentence. Close upon that he was told that his mother waited, and soon afterwards Caroline saw Lady Rochester's barouche drive away, herself and Grace Ormby seated in it side by side, and George Rochester opposite to them.

How very dark the sky had suddenly grown. Caroline looked up to see if the sun still shone; it was setting in clouds of crimson and gold. Was she quite unconscious that the change had only been wrought by his departure?

The next day there was a wedding in Briarly church; a quaint little low church nestling in its graveyard. John Arkright had espoused Martha Brand, and Caroline was bridesmaid.

"It will show people that you are not pining all forlorn, anyway," Mrs. Heath had remarked when Caroline was invited to take the office. "You were a great simpleton, Carry, to give John Arkright up. Half the parish thinks it was he who gave up you; he may protest to the contrary till he's red in the face, and *does*, I believe; they'll never believe him."

There came another glorious sunset. October was in now with its beautiful lights and changing foliage, reminders of the winter that would soon be at hand. The snows and frosts, the dark days of the bitterest winter the world can know, could not match the winter reigning in Caroline Heath's heart.

Yet this sunset was very lovely; even she, with all her pain, could notice that. Everyone was away at home, and she had seized the occasion to get an evening to herself.

She had gone down to the banks of the river, which in its strong current was just there almost like a sea, and seated herself on a bench which was close to its brink, the bank rising behind her. The water was running along swift and sure, just as runs away our life.

If Caroline had never prayed earnestly before, she did then, as she sat there thinking. She prayed that God, who saw all her heart's distress, would help her in the battle she was fighting. It was a very hard one. She loved George Rochester with all the strength of a first passion, and he loved another! *Should* she be able to bear it, and live?

There came a sudden splash, a wild scream. Looking up, Caroline saw at a distance something gold and azure in the water. It was Grace Ormby. In reaching over the bank for some pale blue-bells which grew there, she had overbalanced herself and fallen in.

Caroline sprang up to go to her rescue—if indeed she might be able to accomplish it. A horrible thought surged into her mind: it Grace died—was drowned—she could no longer stand between herself and George Rochester. She drove the demon away with a cry for pardon. "God help me and her! We both need it."

Running swiftly along, she came opposite the spot where the girl was struggling. Clinging to the drooping branch of a willow, she waded in a yard or two, and was just in time to catch the floating blue drapery as Grace was sweeping past. Miss Ormby retained her consciousness, and clung to Caroline with all the tenacity of the drowning.

"If you hold me like that I cannot save you," called out Caroline through the noise of the water surging in their ears. "Loose me, and I will get you to the bank."

It was as if she spoke to the wind. In her terror, the drowning girl only clung the tighter. Caroline was dragged in. The next moment Grace dropped her hold, perhaps with the force of the water, and Caroline felt herself carried away by the current. She looked up at the blue of the evening sky, the gold and crimson sunset her last look, she believed, of this world.

She had sunk twice, when the strong arm of a powerful swimmer closed round her and bore her to the shore. He held her to him for a moment as she lay there; his lips were lifted to God in thanksgiving. It was George Rochester.

"Go to Grace; save *her:* you should not have minded me," spoke Caroline faintly, when she was recovering.

"Hush, my dear. Compose yourself. Grace is all right. *You* saved her. Your last effort before floating away, was to fling her close to the bank, and she caught the willow branch. Our party—we were all not far off—are bearing her away to the nearest house to get her into dry clothes. Yes, you saved Grace, and now, my darling, I have saved you."

She was frightfully ungrateful. She was thinking in her mind's

confusion, that it might have been happier for her had he let her drown.

"I have saved you for myself, Caroline."

"No, no; how can you be cruel enough to say such things? It is Grace who is saved for you; your future wife."

"So you have taken up that pretty problem," he said, laughing. "Not if I know it, my dear. Grace and I perfectly understand one another; she cares for somebody else more than she cares for me."

"I don't understand," murmured Caroline, a curious rift of joy shooting through her heart.

"My mother has an imperious will; for peace sake we do not care to cross it; so Grace and I have let her enjoy her favourite wish uncontradicted—that we should become man and wife. But, my dear"—his tone changing to gravity—"it is not Grace I wish to make my wife; it is another, and her name is Caroline."

"You have been so distant to me lately, so changed," she breathed.

"I had a motive in it. I did not care to disclose the truth to my mother during her sojourn here; she might have visited her vexation upon you. I have loved you, Caroline, ever since that first evening when I saw you standing at the gate with a lily in your hair."

"I am not your equal," she sighed.

"Never think that again," he said, earnestly. "My father was only a poor, humble lad; it was by talent and industry he rose to eminence in his profession and to become Sir George Rochester. Your people are better born than he was. And had it been otherwise, my dear, love levels all things."

"Can it all be really true?" cried the happy girl.

"It is all really true—and will be, God permitting," he answered with emotion, as they heard the tramp of fleet footsteps and congratulating voices at the double rescue bearing down upon them.

Not many months afterwards there was another wedding in the little old church, at which Mrs. Martha Arkright could not reciprocate past favours by officiating as bridesmaid, though her will was good to do it. And George Rochester carried his wife away for ever from the old life of depressing toil to a delightful home in town of love and rest.

WAITING.—A SONG.

I AM waiting, oh, my darling! in the gloaming,
As I waited in the gloaming long ago,
When the soft spring-breeze, through hawthorn branches roaming,
Waved their lovely fairy banners to and fro.
I am waiting, but my face is worn with sorrow,
And the gold has all departed from my hair;
Yet these faded cheeks will glow with joy to-morrow,
When my darling showers his tender kisses there.

I am waiting, but my eyes are dim with weeping,
Oh, my dearest, through long years of bitter pain;
They have lost their youthful light, while fondly keeping
All their loving, faithful watches still in vain.
Thou wilt think of all my weariness and sadness,
Looking down into their tearful depths, and then
They will shine with all the old-time love and gladness,
See thy well-loved face, and never weep again.

I am waiting, in my robe of snowy whiteness—
In that dear white robe my darling loved the best—
And a wild red rose, in all its glowing brightness,
I have twined within the kerchief o'er my breast.
I have placed a tiny cluster of white daisies
(Thou wilt love to see them nestling there, I know)
In the sun-kissed locks that won thy fondest praises
In that happy, happy spring-time long ago.

Ah, my dearest, I am listening in the gloaming
To the welcome, welcome music of thy voice,
And the fragrant breeze, through hawthorn branches roaming,
Waves their fairy banners high, and shouts "Rejoice!"
Now my trembling hands are folded close in thine, love,
And my longing eyes behold thy face at last,
While I hear thee fondly whispering, "Ever mine, love,"
For the weary, weary waiting now is past!

FANNY FORRESTER.

HE AND HESTER HURRIED TO THE WEST PORCH, AND FLINGING OPEN THE GREEN BAIZE DOORS, SOLVED THE MYSTERY.

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW HESTER WAITED FOR NEWS.

EDRIC was not unmindful of his promise to let Hester Archdale hear the end—if end it were—of his adventures.

The *Royal Denbigh* being short of officers, and his chances of a visit to town uncertain, he had to content himself with writing, and in the course of the next and following days began a dozen letters at least. Despite his most strenuous endeavours, each of them broke down utterly in the course of a page or two and came to an untimely end in the waste-paper basket.

He made the discovery—by no means a novel one—that a faithful account of his experiences was not to be had for the mere writing down. For one thing, his impressions of his interview with Euphrosyne changed completely each time he recalled them. Sometimes the whole scene became so utterly meaningless and its conclusion so flat, that he decided it had been a fiasco from beginning to end. Euphrosyne and her confederates had taken him for somebody else, found out their blunder, and got rid of him—that was all. Again it seemed full of sinister meaning. He ought to write and warn Monk forthwith—against what? Then again it was a crazy freak of a superstitious woman. She was anxious to prove an alibi, for some reason of her own, his evidence came in useful, and it pleased her to make a melodramatic scene of it. There it was, clear as daylight. Sometimes the whole incident seemed pregnant with suggestions of tragedy, and he shrank from implicating Hester even by a confidence.

Perhaps he was unconsciously hampered by the recollection of Euphrosyne's last words—however much he persuaded himself he disregarded them. His account at last, not achieved till after many days, was a lame performance after all, only to be sent if he failed to see Hester. A week had passed before his chance came, and meanwhile, Hester waited and wondered, and Roswal and the young Buccleuch had rather a bad time of it—especially Roswal.

It was the sultry weather, Hester supposed, that made steady work impossible, and sent her off into languid fits of dreaming at critical moments, or else drove her into sticking doggedly at her easel long after both eyes and fingers had given signs of being past all good work for that day.

Master Jack expressed his sentiments after the manner of his kind; grimaced, fidgetted, insisted on being bribed into goodness with unlimited chocolate creams; presented his heels instead of his head for his sister's contemplation; tried the sharpness of his little sword on the nearest chair-back; made art experiments of his own with charcoal and turpentine; and, in fact, generally conducted himself after the fashion of his elfish double, till dismissed in disgrace to the nursery.

Roswal knew all about it. He would pose "in act to spring" obediently enough; but in a limp, uninterested fashion. "What's the use?" his great red eyes seemed to ask eloquently. "Why *should* I glare? If I did, instead of getting it down on canvas forthwith, you let the very slightest interruption— a postman's knock, or a stray step in the drawing-room—set your attention wandering for minutes together. Cats? No, I *don't* believe you!" It was treatment to make any dog flop down disgustedly, hang his great tongue out imbecilely and pant in exasperation.

"It's the weather, Cuss. I'm just as stupid as you to-day." It was a glaringly unjust comparison, but Cuss only blinked the more. "Such a good day too, old dog. Papa gone off with mother for the whole afternoon; no one to interrupt us; but," regretfully, "I *can't* paint, somehow. I'm getting nervous. Suppose we go round to Rose Damien's. She likes me to be there on a Monday; and you shall lie in the conservatory and watch the gold fish; and in the evening we'll have the horses out, and then, and *then*, old darling, you'll get your turn. Anything's better than waiting for people who don't mean to come, or who may just as easily be met at Rose's; eh?"

Roswal came and sat up against her very hard for a moment to express approval, and then lumbered downstairs to the hall-door, so as to lose no time at the start.

There were a few hot days in that year's June, and this was one of them. The pavement scorched, the houses reflected heat, the sun beat through Hester's red parasol, the wind was a hot blast, the shadow a glow. Hester and Roswal both rejoiced when, the fiery transit over, they found themselves in shelter at St. Maur Road, listening in the hall to the murmur of voices above, that showed no falling off in the number of Mrs. Damien's Monday visitors. Hester decided on entering unannounced through the conservatory, and disposing of Roswal on the way. He had his own favourite nook under a stand of palms, where the tiles were cold and damp, and a lazy little fountain close by dripped musically into its moss-edged basin.

Hester's eyes, dazzled by the outer glare, at first wandered unrecognisingly from group to group in the cool, softly-lighted room, which

Mrs. Damien had arranged after her own ideas of comfort, and which looked strangely foreign and bare with its polished boards, filmy muslin draperies, and complete absence of heavy or needless ornament. All colour and brightness seemed concentrated in one spot, where Aunt Mamie stood presiding magnificently over a table piled with flowers, fruit and coloured sweetmeats till it looked like a giant nosegay; and dispensing the contents of a mighty silver bowl all dimmed with a chilly dew from the clinking blocks of ice that floated in a golden tinted mixture amongst slices of pineapple, spirals of lemons, and only Aunt Mamie knew what besides.

Aunt Mamie herself was a goodly sight. Her scarlet handkerchief was the brightest point of colour in the room; her white teeth flashed in delighted smiles; her great gold earrings swung and twinkled with each movement; her high cap and apron were so fresh, so frilled, so marvellously beyond all imaginable results of mere clear-starchery, that they might have been whipped to a froth out of sugar and snow and sent home by the confectioner.

"Nobody there!" said Hester, softly. "Nobody."

About a dozen people came under that description, and she proceeded to tell them over mentally. "The Lepells as usual—Mr. Lepell with his croud of girl worshippers. There are the Bostonians, those dreadfully cultured, pretty girls who know more about England than anyone over here can ever tell them, and have a theory ready made to account for everything. Lady Beatrix talking nonsense with her mouth full of strawberries, with all the men in the room admiring, except her husband. I wonder who that is bringing her an ice? I've seen him several times here lately, I think. Handsome, distinguished-looking and badly dressed. He *must* be a somebody to go about in a coat like *that;* besides, she looks so gratified at his attention. He's not listening to a word she says. He's looking right over her head at Rose. Who is Rose talking to? I wish someone would move and let me see. A lady—*Lady Monchalsea!*" Hester's little foot gave such a vicious little stamp that Roswal lifted his head with a jerk and looked all attention. "Wicked old woman! I thought she was dead! She shall see *I* am alive presently."

Mrs. Damien swaying gracefully in her big cane rocking-chair was waving idly her feather fan, and listening with absent eyes to the authoritative remarks of an imposing lady, who seated bolt upright, one foot on a stool, surveyed the company with a sort of magisterial air through a great gold eye-glass, all unconscious of being surveyed in her turn by the calm, handsome eyes of one of the fair Bostonians, evidently noting and storing up her peculiarities for future study—as a type. Lady Monchalsea had a thin, high-pitched nose and voice, and spoke in studied phrase.

"My dear," she was saying, "of course, in these days, thanks to Cook, every human creature has a chance of going everywhere. It is not *what* we see, but *how* we see it, that must be considered."

Mrs. Damien assented languidly; the fair Bostonian smiled approval.

"The tourist who infests the Alps may carry away some recollection of mere scenery, and enjoy his own vulgar holiday in his own vulgar way. But to stand face to face with nature in company with one capable of interpreting the higher beauty that appeals only to ——"

There was the stir of a fresh arrival. A tall young gentleman, with a close-cropped blonde head, was standing before Mrs. Damien. Hester's heart beat a trifle faster and then sank down fathoms deep, as he turned a rosy, vacuous, unknown face towards Lady Beatrix, while Lady Monchalsea, eye-glass and sentence held in suspension, frowned portentously on the interruption. Then the penetrating accents resumed.

"If it were an every-day travelling party that I were asking you to join, I could understand your hesitation. What I offer is no ordinary privilege—to visit the Alps in company with Professor Montrose."

"Professor Montrose?" Hester exclaimed to Roswal in astonishment.

And "Montrose" echoed in a low but enthusiastic whisper from the Boston group. "Montrose."

The handsome, odd-looking man turned from his chat with Lady Beatrix with much alacrity. "Did you call me, Mrs. Damien?"

"No. It was Lady Monchalsea who mentioned your name." And then, in response to the appeal of three pairs of lovely envious eyes, she proceeded to make the great man known to his transatlantic admirers, and provide him with three fresh followers on the spot. She seemed nervous and absent, only anxious to break away civilly from Lady Monchalsea.

Lady Beatrix, after a pout at the Professor's desertion, brightened up as three more masculine figures appeared on the scene. Hester disposed of these at a glance. Not one of them could have been mistaken for Edric for a moment. One dark—one short—one an old acquaintance. She watched each in his turn drift into Lady Beatrix's circle, and Lady Monchalsea seize her victim once more like the Ancient Mariner the wedding guest.

"You and I, Beatrix and Augustus Lepell, and Mr. Montrose—I know how much you will have in common with both the poet and the artist ——"

"Is that all your party?" interrupted Rose.

"We did expect Monchalsea and his wife, but Zillah is very delicate just now and keeps him prisoner beside her sofa. Perhaps Ted may get a holiday. I hope so. I am an old woman now and must have someone to see after my little comforts, and Ted knows the northern Tyrol better than any courier."

Hester started, and sallied forth in hot indignation. The arrangement was quite intelligible to her *now*. The Hon. Ted Boughton

was the last left on his mother's hands of a large, unlovely and unimprovable family, all the rest of whom had been adroitly disposed of in matrimony by their sagacious parent in half-a-dozen seasons. Lord Monchalsea, the eldest, most unlovely, and most unpromising, had offered himself to Mrs. Damien within a week of her arrival in England, to be refused and to carry his rejected title and affections to a wealthy daughter of the Tribes within another fortnight. A sufficient time had elapsed for Ted to be produced with decency; and so—and so——"

Mrs. Damien sprang forward to her as if welcoming the interruption. "Hester! I beg your pardon for not seeing you sooner. Have you been here long?"

"I have been in the conservatory putting Roswal by. He makes people hot to look at him this weather."

"Just like Henderson," laughed Mrs. Damien. "I daren't put a butler into a white suit; and besides he is miserable without his tea-tray; so I've deposed him in favour of Aunt Mamie. Doesn't she look delightful?" Hester detected a harassed air of preoccupation under Rose's gay tone, and held her hand fast.

"I couldn't help overhearing you," she confessed, with a glance of supreme disfavour at her old antipathy, Lady Monchalsea, who was eyeing her superciliously. "Don't you want to go? Why don't you say so at once, and get rid of her?"

Rose looked at her with a gentle wistfulness. "I can't decide. Perhaps it would be best to go—but the wisest decision is always the hardest. If I thought I should be missed here—ever so little—by anybody—I would stay, oh, so gladly."

She broke off; the Bostonians were taking leave, going off with the Professor to see somebody's pictures. There was a little outbreak of parting words. Hester heard "Zwiesel Alp," "Königsee," "Just too lovely," "Pasterne Glacier!" &c. &c., to all of which Mrs. Damien listened, constrainedly smiling, with the distressed line between her brows that Hester alone could read.

"I'm a blind, selfish wretch," she thought, with sudden illumination, as she watched the farewells. "She knows I hate the thoughts of her going back to those Monchalseas, and she is too shy to tell me what her real wishes are. Why has she never mentioned the Professor's name to me? Perhaps they are old friends. I like his looks. I like the way his face lights up when he looks at her. I'm not afraid of that hulking, smoke-dried Ted Boughton. He and his mother may do their worst; Rose is safe from all danger from their attractions; but this man is of a different stamp."

A whole romance unfolded itself in the girl's busy brain before the shabby coat of the unconscious hero had finally disappeared through the doorway. She looked for Rose, anxious to show her comprehension, her sympathy. Mr. Lepell had dawdled up to their neighbourhood.

"You must come, Mrs. Damien. Beatrix will burn my sketch-book and throw my paint-box out of the window if I have nobody to support me. Now with you and Montrose ——"

Mrs. Damien turned away sharply, almost rudely.

"What do you think of the conservatory, Hester? Did you ever see the lilies so fine—though, of course, the best have gone to St. Fridolin's."

"The best of everything goes to St. Fridolin's, of course. My dear, that is just what all your friends are beginning to complain of," spoke Lady Monchalsea, unexpectedly, in a tone of iced spite.

Mrs. Damien flushed hotly, and gave her a haughty, defiant glance.

"Don't let St. Fridolin's keep you, Rose," eagerly interposed Hester. You know we can get someone to take your lectures. Miss Coutell is disengaged and would be only too glad to come. The parish could very well spare you for a few weeks. I cannot see why you should not go."

She spoke even more emphatically than was needful, keeping her eyes away from her friend's face till the last words, when she broke short off, startled at the miserable, half-imploring look in Mrs. Damien's lovely eyes. It vanished before she fairly caught it; and Rose was laughing a mocking, hard little laugh.

"There is independent testimony to the value of my exertions! Quite trustworthy too; so I may as well decide at once. When do you want me, Lady Monchalsea? The last week in June? Yes, that will suit me perfectly."

"Have I done wrong?" Hester asked herself anxiously; but she had no chance of even guessing, for the Lepells departed and were replaced by others, friends of Hester's, to whom Mrs. Damien abandoned them as others succeeded.

Aunt Mamie's bowl was running low before the room cleared again and Hester could approach her friend.

"Are you angry with what I said, Rose? Of course we all want you dreadfully. It will be hateful without you, and no one can really take your place."

"Hush, dear. It is all right, and the question is settled." Then, as if to change the subject: "I am rather worried about my poor Birdie. Mr. de Cressy came early, and says she is very unhappy and longing to see me. That unlucky brother has actually enlisted, and the old man is furious. I know what she will have to bear, poor child. I promised to go to her this evening, but Lady Monchalsea is going to stay to dinner, so I must wait till to-morrow."

"I'll go!" cried Hester, springing to a sudden decision. "I've nothing to do here. I shall be better than nobody. At all events I can tell her why you didn't come. Do let me!"

"The City—this blazing day—and it's getting late," Mrs. Damien exclaimed. Then, seeing Hester was resolved: "You must drive. I

will order the brougham ; but I dread what Lady Archdale will say. She hardly likes your going with me in the mornings."

Hester took her wilful way, as she generally did, Roswal in attendance, much as he disliked carriage exercise. Shine was hotter, shade was stuffier, as they drove citywards ; air was less, smells were more. Hester drove straight to St. Fridolin's and made her way on foot to Lavender Row. It had more the look of a half-emptied dust-bin than ever. Elsie's flowers were the only sweet, and her windows the only clean things about the place. Behind the blank, black wall the engine's ceaseless thud and clash seemed to make life hotter to hear it. The front-door was on the latch, after the primitive fashion of Lavender Row, so Hester entered, and tapped gently on the low, crooked panelled door.

"Come in," said a gay little voice, stopping in a snatch of song. Elsie's little sewing machine stood on the table beside her, and she was making it spin along gaily by way of accompaniment. "Miss Archdale ! " she cried, in surprise, while Hester stood in wonderment at the girl's changed looks. She wore the same little spotted black print gown with the close little white frill round her throat that Hester had always known her in, but a pretty pink colour tinted each pale cheek. Her great eyes were full of light and life, her pretty lips were curving with smiles. Even the invalid's listless attitude had gone, and she was sitting erect and busy, and rose alertly to receive her visitor.

"I have a message from Mrs. Damien," Hester began, somewhat awkwardly. Was this the forlorn, drooping creature she had hurried to console. "She could not come herself to you, and sent me to hear what has gone amiss—with your brother, I mean. We were all so sorry."

"Won't you sit down?" Elsie asked, offering a chair. "How very kind of you to come so far on this hot day. Indeed, I should not have thought of troubling you. May I make you a cup of tea ? The kettle is boiling. I expect father home soon."

"No, thank you," said Hester, vaguely dissatisfied. It was the same gentle, courteous Elsie, but her manner had just the slightest touch of gay carelessness in it, almost the bright sauciness of assured good fortune, that was puzzling.

"What did you wish to know ? " she said, quite respectfully.

"Why, we all thought you were in such distress about Sampson," she began.

"Did you," said Elsie, amusedly. "I suppose to a lady it does seem a very dreadful thing to enlist, but to us it is different, and Sampson is sure to get on. He is a good shot to begin with, and if his instructor likes he can do much for him ; and he is over twenty, so it won't count as boy's service." Elsie stopped ; Hester still more surprised at her fluent command of the subject.

"If Mr. Paramount is satisfied ——"

Elsie's face fell. "Indeed, Miss Archdale, he takes it to heart terribly; but if I can only get him to listen to what Mr. Poynter says I'm sure he must come round."

"Mr. Poynter! What do you know about him?" Hester tried to ask indifferently.

Elsie flushed hotly. "He was good enough to come and explain things to us—to me," she said. "He has been here to-day," in a low tone. "He is very kind, and will take an interest in Sammy."

"Oh, well, I am glad it is all so very satisfactory," said Hester, trying not to speak curtly and drily. "Good-bye, Elsie; Mrs. Damien will be pleased to hear of you. You are looking so well, too."

"I have kind friends who take care of me—Oh! the dog, the dog!"

"What is it, Roswal? Down, sir! down!" For Roswal had suddenly flung himself at the door, and was tearing furiously at the floor with a low, savage growl. He stopped at Hester's voice, but never moved his nose from the ground.

"Come here!" cried his mistress, imperatively. "I am so sorry he frightened you. I suppose it was a cat outside. Now quiet, will you. Good-bye."

She opened the door and passed out, but at one bound the dog was half-way up the low staircase, and before she could overtake him was growling and tearing frantically at a closed door on the landing above. Hester seized him by the collar and dragged him away, struggling rebelliously and screwing his head round, half-choked but still obstinate. She gave in and dropped him in despair at last, when his sense of what was due to a lady seemed suddenly restored and he sprawled downstairs again obediently beside her.

Once in the street, Hester felt ready to sit down and cry. Roswal's misconduct following on the rebuff she had received had quite unstrung her nerves. The noise had made her head ache, the hot drive with home at the end of it seemed unendurable to contemplate. Instinctively she crossed the crowded street, after a word to the coachman, and ascended a short flight of steps between two blocks of warehouses and so on through a crooked lane, under a covered alley and out into the open space in front of St. Fridolin's.

The church door yawned open, wide and dark. Here at least she should find quiet and solitude. Here she might rest, weep, pray as she listed; yet half unwillingly she crossed the churchyard, Roswal at her heels. Within was gloom and emptiness, and stillness so deep that even her soft footfall on the flagged aisle seemed to rouse irreverent echoes. She slipped into one of the seats, and sinking on her knees dropped her face on her arms with a sob of weariness. Roswal, after tentatively licking her elbow, the brim of her hat, and her boot-heel very delicately, decided that it was not a case for his ministrations and departed to make sure that the horse and carriage were not absconding in his absence. Finding that the coachman, who was well

used to "our lady's" ways, had driven round to his usual position, he returned satisfied to await his mistress's pleasure.

How long she knelt there Hester did not know. Another footfall on the flags aroused her, and lifting her head she saw the Vicar entering by the vestry door and looking thoughtfully around. She hoped he did not see her. There was always a certain unspoken antagonism between them, though either would strenuously have denied the fact and professed the highest regard for the other; so, still as a mouse she kept, her bright eyes regarding him sharply.

Possibly her mood, a most unusual one, rendered her more sympathetic than usual, for she noted for the first time the weary look in his eyes, the anxious lines of brow and lip; or, perhaps, fancying himself alone, he let slip aside for a moment the mask of grave impassiveness that shielded him from the outer world. However it was, instead of the dignified parish priest, calm and strong and self-contained, Hester seemed to see a sorrowful, trouble-laden man, with eyes full of a hopeless yearning, and lips set in pathetic resignation. She looked and wondered, and half rose, and then he saw her. He seemed to take her being there for granted, that was one comfort, Hester thought.

"You are early for Evensong, Miss Archdale. I thought I was late!"

"I didn't come for Service. I came to think and rest," she answered him rather brusquely.

"No better place." He didn't begin upon Church privileges, or lecture her on neglected opportunities, as Hester dimly feared. He only stood with his face slightly up-raised to the light, thoughtfully smiling.

"I've had a very bad day," Hester spoke out suddenly and unaccountably. "Everything wrong and wretched from the beginning. It wasn't my fault. That I maintain. I'm not going in for any dishonest self-abasement. I only want peace and quietness to think things out and see where the misfit lies."

"And have you succeeded?"

"No, not quite," she admitted. "I still feel injured and don't know who to blame."

Mr. Stannard looked courteously, kindly attentive, and she went on impulsively. "It is just this: I used to think I was a great deal to many people, and now I have been suddenly shown that I am of no use to anybody, and it hurts."

"I do not understand you."

"I have had to nurse mamma, and manage the house, since I was quite a little girl; and daddy used to consult me and call me his commanding officer, only in fun, but it was half-true; and, of course, I was an important person in my way. Mamma is well again and we are all happy about it, only, she seems to have taken up life just where she laid it down a dozen years ago. All the arrangements of the house are wrong and must be altered forthwith; I am only a little girl to be looked after and found fault with and ordered about all day long.

Daddy is wrapped up in her (so he ought to be), and never takes my part by word or look. Why, mamma won't even let a visitor be admitted if she is not at home to receive him, and begins to think I ought to go nowhere without her. I can't make myself twelve years old again."

"Don't try. Let Lady Archdale realise by degrees that you are a grown up, reasonable woman." She mistrusted his use of the second adjective, and hastened to strengthen her case.

"I had Rose to lean on at least, or so I thought till to-day, when I found how completely outside her life I am, how little needful I am to her. Oh, it hurts, it hurts!"

"Tell me," Mr. Stannard said, with a thrill of sympathy in his voice. "What has she done?"

"I am not jealous of her love," Hester protested, half crying. "I would give her up gladly to any man worthy of it; but I am perfectly justified in mistrusting and despising the Monchalsea set. And to leave us all for them!"

She dashed her tears away defiantly, and in reply to his questioning look told briefly the story of that afternoon, as she had read it. Professor Montrose's name came in with a certain hesitation, and his part in the programme was slurred over, in her anxiety not to betray her friend. But she had an uncomfortable sense that the Vicar was, somehow, mentally supplying the gaps in her narrative; and she hurried on to her vexation about her fruitless errand to Elsie, laughing at her own inconsistency in being vexed. Then she stopped.

"Now tell me the real story. This is all Prologue, is it not?" was the unexpected comment.

She flushed up to her honest brown eyes, that wavered and drooped for an instant, and then lifted themselves straightforwardly to the Vicar's face.

"No, those are my real troubles; the other is only imaginary."

"None the less a trouble."

"I have been consulted on a very delicate and important matter. I have been intensely interested, and kept in suspense for a week, waiting for further news which has never come. Not because there wasn't any, but because somebody didn't think it worth his while to come and tell me. I never asked to be confided in. Perhaps he has forgotten the circumstance. It's insulting to be thrown over this way." Hester winked a little wrathful tear back. "It's not baffled curiosity that makes me so angry, it's because I'm disappointed in somebody."

"Don't mistrust too readily, and don't condemn somebody unheard. That is all the advice I have to offer you. I see you are quite capable of saying to yourself all that there is to be said about your difficulties. My lips could give it no more authority. Besides, it's service time"—looking at his watch—"what has happened to old Totterdale? No bell!"

He and Hester hurried to the west porch, and flinging open the great baize doors solved the mystery.

The congregation, four in number, two old men, a girl, and a widow in rusty crape, stood in a respectful semi-circle around, while Roswal stretched across the doorway, jealously insisted that his mistress's privacy should be respected. His looks were quite sufficient, though a boy's cap between his paws, and a chewed bit of broomstick looked as though an example had been made of somebody.

Across the churchyard old Totterdale was seen approaching with a big bewildered policeman in tow, who looked as if the job were quite out of his line, while a hatless little boy gyrated wildly around.

Hester comprehended, explained, apologised, made Roswal give a paw to one of the old men, pacified old Totterdale, restored the cap with a shilling inside to the owner, and satisfied the policeman. She felt as if some of her troubles had melted in the telling, and tripped back to her carriage with a lighter heart. Once there and alone with Roswal, the cloud descended again even more blackly. Cuss knew it, and laid a heavy paw in her lap, with wistful eyes fixed on her face.

"Did you believe her, Cuss? Do you think it likely that he would go to her, and forget about you and me, old dog?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DEAD FLOWER.

MAKING his way to the orderly-room on the morning of that self-same day, Edric had become aware of a young fellow advancing towards him with a comically conscious air that made him vaguely wonder who he was, and stop to look at him as he saluted. The lad stopped, too, as though rather expecting to be spoken to.

Another time Edric might not have bestowed a second glance on him. But just then his mind happened to be running on the events of that night week—Mrs. Damien's guests—Hester and Sir John—Elsie Paramount, with her wistful eyes and timid little question—"I want to know—how to get into the army"—and he laughed kindly to himself at the recollection.

It was the brother himself—the performer in the Septett—who stood before him, he realised suddenly, with a faint touch of consternation.

"Why—are you young Paramount?"

"Yes, sir," severely repressing his delight at being recognised.

"And what are you doing here?"

"Just been to the Colonel, sir. I came down on Saturday night."

"What? You've enlisted? What made you do such a thing?" Edric demanded, discouragingly.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it's what I feel most fit for."

"Well, you know best yourself. I've heard you haven't done much good in any other line."

Sampson shifted his feet uneasily, and his mouth, curiously

sensitive and like his sister's, twitched a little. "I haven't done much good to myself, or been a credit to anybody, I know, sir. I hope it won't tell against me. I want to make a fresh start here. It was the work drove me wrong; indeed it was. After sitting screwed to a desk all day I used to feel crazy when I got loose again, and didn't know what I was doing. My head isn't strong enough for figures, sir."

Edric laughed a little, looked at the alert, soldier-like bearing of the boy, his open face, and eyes that looked wistful like Elsie's sometimes. He wondered how far his promise to Elsie committed him, and whether the young fellow knew of it.

"What do your people at home say to this?"

Sampson's face fell. "I haven't asked them. I just left a letter to say what I was going to do. Saturday was my last day at the office, so I came down here by the afternoon train. I didn't know then that I shouldn't be allowed to go back to explain. I think, perhaps, if my father had it out with me his mind would be more satisfied. Shall I *ever* be let away again, sir?"

Edric felt more relieved now he found that he had done nothing to bring about the catastrophe. "I can't say, but you'll find you are anything but a free agent now. Tied tighter than you ever were to the office."

"May be, sir. But I shan't have to think."

"Certainly not. That's done for you." And Edric, marvelling at the way in which a profession and a man seem to fit now and then, went on his way.

He rather wondered how he could best fulfil Elsie's timid little request. He hoped she had not taken his half-jesting words for more than they were worth—little shy, confiding thing. He could keep an eye on the youngster and see how he got on, but he couldn't think of anything else. Perhaps he ought to go and see the father and try to make Sampson's peace with him? Yes, he certainly ought to do that. Not from motives of pure philanthropy by any means. He had a very distinct vision of Mrs. Damien smiling on him ever so graciously and thanking him for the kind interest he was showing in her protégé. He would get the Paramounts' address and start off to town at once. First to the old father; then to the Archdales—he felt somehow as if that interview with Hester would clear his mind marvellously. Last and late, so as to avoid the ugly rush of callers, to St. Maur Road.

So he plotted and planned on his townward way; and prospered—as such self-seeking deserved.

As he drew near Lavender Row a misgiving seized him as to the propriety of his interference. He had a dim notion that a clergyman was the proper mediator in a family difficulty—especially when that family was a churchwarden's. He would make for St. Fridolin's and consult the Vicar, he thought; and then, just as luck would have it, he came full upon de Cressy.

"I'll go with you and show you the way," he said, when the case was put to him, "but I think you'd better tell the story yourself. My good word wouldn't do much for your recruit with his father, I'm sorry to say. There's the house, and there's Mr. Paramount just going in."

The little old gentleman, umbrella in hand and a huge roll of papers under his arm, turned and faced Edric in the narrow passage.

Edric introduced himself, for de Cressy had fled. "I have a message to give you from your son, Mr. Paramount."

"Then I must beg of you *not* to deliver it," was the disconcerting reply. "I have no desire to hear more of him."

Edric was almost tempted to give up the point and retreat discomfited, but Mr. Paramount flung open the parlour door hospitably wide, and he caught a glimpse of Elsie crouching in her window-seat, her pretty eyes opened to their widest with startled delight, her hand pressed on her heart, which had given one great beat, and then stood still with delicious incredulity at the sound of the voice outside.

He could but enter and make a second attempt in Sampson's behalf, addressing himself to her this time, as her father with ostentatious indifference began to unfasten his papers and turn them over. Still, he *was* listening, Edric thought, so he delivered himself of a little explanatory speech, making out the best case he could for Sampson, while Elsie blushed, and murmured her thanks, and lifted her eyes in shy, grateful glances.

Mr. Paramount fidgeted about, sorting, selecting, and finally rolling up his papers again. Then, when Edric felt there was nothing more to be done but depart, he also took up his hat, and they left the house in company.

They walked side by side in silence for some distance.

"I ought to have thanked you for your kind intentions in coming here," he began, with a sort of snappish humility. "I'm sure you meant well. You must forgive a poor old man whose pride in his family is broken down for ever. I've other matters on my mind, too. Public grievances as well as private misfortunes."

He was guiding Edric by a series of short cuts towards the more frequented thoroughfares, and now they stopped at the door of a small public-house. He noticed Edric's glance at the name: The Blue Dog, by P. Garraghty: and continued, slightly flurried. "I must explain. There is a meeting of parishioners here to-day. We have to concert measures to stem the tide of dangerous innovation that is sweeping over us. There is a memorial to the bishop in preparation. The crying scandal."

Edric was occupied hailing a hansom. "Is it such a bad case?" he asked, inattentively. "I should have thought you could have found worse elsewhere."

"Nowhere, sir, nowhere," with a fiery stamp of his umbrella; "that is, not to *my* knowledge. Not that I ever attend anywhere outside St. Fridolin's."

The hansom stopped. "Good-bye, Mr. Paramount. You must let me say that I don't see why your son shouldn't make his way up and be a credit to you." The old gentleman cut the subject short with an angry head-shake. "And I'm awfully sorry that you've other troubles as well; but—but," seeking for a consolatory word, "I daresay there are many worse places than St. Fridolin's, if you'd only look about you."

Mr. Paramount lifted his hat and turned sharply away, but as the swing door of The Blue Dog closed behind him, a meditative expression crossed his features, and he shook his head doubtfully.

As to Edric, he drove as fast as wheels could take him to the Archdales', only to find Sir John, Lady Archdale, and Hester, all out; and then to Mrs. Damien's, where he found a crowd of visitors, his hostess languid, absent, and absorbed in the discussion of the approaching journey: whilst Lady Monchalsea, triumphant and dictatorial, sang alternately the praises of Professor Montrose and the Honourable Ted Boughton.

He had done a bad day's work, he decided moodily that evening as he returned to Shorncliffe. He would have been still more convinced of it had he guessed the unwonted stir and agitation his visit had left behind him in Lavender Row. It would more have provoked than gratified him to know the audacious little fancies that set Elsie singing over her work, even while she could have beaten herself for sheer vexation at the remembrance of her own childish shyness in his presence. Elsie never cared to sit dreaming now. Life came too near and was too feverishly interesting. Was she not beginning to act a timid little part of her own in the great world-drama, instead of sitting a far-off, silent spectator? Hester's visit, following close on Edric's, excited her unaccountably. She unconsciously divined Hester's disapproval, and as unconsciously defied it. She tossed her head, and sang again over her lengths of cloth and lining. The machine began to run rather crookedly presently, and then came to a stop. She threw her work aside impatiently, and walked out into the passage, where she was fain to rest for a moment before creeping step by step up the staircase, mounting it for the second time only since the fall which had lamed her when a child.

Her face flushed, and she bit her lip and winced once or twice before she gained the door which Roswal had attacked so savagely; but she reached it at last, and, turning the handle, peeped timidly in. The room was long and low pitched, and the great window-shutter was closed to keep out some of the sunshine that even there made itself felt. There was a curtain screening a bed in a recess; a tall press with brass mountings; an iron cooking stove in the fireplace, a couch, and a long lounging chair in which Mrs. Beltran was lying, looking idly at the glints of light on the beams and rafters above her, and doing nothing else.

"Come in!" she cried, imperatively, without looking to see who entered. "I have been waiting for you. Lie down there."

A great black tom-cat rose from the soft, shabby cushions of the couch, and, after arching his back and turning his green eyes suspiciously on Elsie, vacated the place in her favour.

She dropped down gladly, and lay with her eyes closed for a while. Above her hung a blurred and tarnished convex mirror, round which damaged white cupids, noseless and armless, frolicked in chipped and blackened garlands of roses, on one of which was hitched a dried snake-skin. Beneath was a horrible little human figure into which the roots of some tree had twisted themselves, helped by some rude carving. It seemed to be pointing at Mrs. Beltran, and she gave it a friendly glance at times.

She looked attentively, but without rising, at Elsie's white face and closed eyes, and then extended her hand lazily to a low table near her on which stood a curious little vessel, a silver ball standing on three feet, the upper part perforated, and in one of the holes a silver tube. She gently drew with her lips at the tube once or twice.

A sweet spiced vapour ascended in filmy spirals and diffused itself through the room: not a drowsy or languid perfume; pungent and stimulating rather. Mrs. Beltran inhaled it with long, deep-drawn breaths, and the great cat came with a noiseless run, and would have sprung at it, but for a sharp command from his mistress that sent him crouching down with greedy eyes. She lent forward so as to hold the ball within a few inches of Elsie's face. The girl's nostrils quivered, her eyes opened and looked about brightly, and she rose with a smile.

"You were waiting for me?" she asked.

Mrs. Beltran replaced the vessel on its stand, and flung herself lazily back again, her long white arms tossed over her head. Her unbound masses of glossy, faintly rippling, blue-black hair streamed over her loose crimson wrapper. Her naked, yellowish-white foot balanced a velvet slipper on the toe.

"Little fool!" she spoke, with contemptuous good humour, "you doubt me, you try to deceive me, and would like to keep away from me—if you could." Elsie made a hasty gesture in protest. "You never meant to come here and tell me about your visitors, you know. Don't then. And don't come to me in your troubles. Stay away, and try what your grand friends can do for you."

"I did send a message to Mrs. Damien," Elsie admitted. "On Saturday, after we had heard from Sammy and were all so miserable; and Miss Archdale has been here just now. She was very kind—but ——"

"But just a little too late in showing it, eh? You didn't feel to want consoling much by that time?"

"It was just as kind of her to come ——"

"Are you a veritable simpleton or only a make-believe?" Mrs.

Beltran enquired, in her level, indifferent tone, with scarce a shade of emphasis. "Don't you see the worth of all that? Can you not see, silly one, how they will pet and patronise you willingly as long as you are content to stay, sickly and humble, well out of their way? Eh? But begin a little to know your own value. Dare to live for yourself; then see Miss Archdale look disgusted, and snub you, and put you back into your place again."

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Elsie, with great eyes of horror. "It makes me feel wicked to agree with you. They have all been so good, so good to me."

"Have they? How long have you known Mrs. Damien?"

"Since October; nearly eight months.

"And what has she done for you in that time? Petted you, lectured you on patience and resignation, given you a handful out of her wealth in alms, amused herself with your devotion." Mrs. Beltran was sitting upright by this time, her dusky hands gesticulating eloquently, though her voice was still low and level. "And I? How many days is it since you came to me?"

"Four days ago." Elsie hung her head and spoke under her breath.

"Four days ago! Is it only that since you crept here to me to remind me of my promise. You brought me your dead flower. You were faint and sick with crying over it—crying for your lost chance, perhaps—crying for your wasted youth—for your share of the world's happiness—how do I know! I gave you my help unquestioningly, and I will do it again. It would have been an easier task to make the dead blossom live again. Ah, now you open your eyes in foolish wonder, while you think nothing of greater things."

Mrs. Beltran rose with a swift, sudden movement and stood before Elsie, holding out to her the little box, in which lay a few yellow shrivelled leaves and a bare stalk. A wooden bucket of water stood by the stove. She lifted it to where Elsie could see into it. On the corner shelf above stood a large calabash, fancifully engraved, which she set afloat on the water like a tiny boat, and then shook the dead flower into it. She covered the top of the bucket with the large silk handkerchief which she had worn knotted round her throat, glancing as she did so at Elsie's face, all alive with devouring curiosity.

"You must have patience," she said.

"Four days!" she went on, "and scarcely as many hours in those as Mrs. Damien has had weeks. Would I keep you humble, weak, and dependent on me for your poor little morsels of enjoyment? No!"

She was pacing the room now with her graceful, velvet tread, her glowing robe trailing behind her, and the cat walking step for step at her side, his great tail erect and stiff, only the point waving gently.

"No, a thousand times no! I have given you your youth again; health and strength; beauty—look for yourself in that glass. And I say to you 'Go and take for yourself of the good things that life holds

for the young, the strong, the beautiful!' There is pleasure in handfuls for the young and strong; and for beauty there is—Love!"

She stopped full in front of Elsie, who covered her burning cheeks with her hands, while her eyes shone half in delight, half in terror.

"Love? That means a lover?" she whispered.

"Keep your secrets to yourself, child. I want none of them. The day may come when you would give your heart's blood for the power I hold in my hand. You know I do?"

Elsie bowed assentingly.

"The day will come when the world is too strong for you; when you will see him drifting, drifting away out of your reach, and your grand friends will be the first to draw him from you. Then come to me, and I will cast back to you none of your miserable doubts and cruel thoughts of me. You need say but 'Help me!' and if he were at the church door with Mrs. Damien he should leave her and come back to you."

Elsie's brows knitted for a second. "I don't think I should care for a lover who had to be brought back to me," she said, lifting her head rather proudly. "You don't *quite* understand me yet. I am grateful, you don't know how grateful, to you for all you have done for me, but I don't want you to do anything more. Give me the health and strength you promised me, and perhaps I shall be able to keep the lover for myself," and she laughed roguishly.

Mrs. Beltran laughed too, secretly a trifle perplexed by this sudden outbreak of spirit on the girl's part. "Well done! You deserve him, and I hope he'll come soon to take care of you when I am gone away with my husband."

"Gone away?" rather blankly.

"Did you think I should stay here for ever? He is in good employment, filling his pockets with money, and in six weeks or so they will be full and he will come back, and we shall live in an hotel and go to the theatre every night. Yes, and you shall come too, and drive in a carriage, and know what champagne tastes like." Mrs. Beltran stopped in her walk and sank again into her chair, smiling jovially in frank enjoyment of the prospect. "And when he's a rich man——"

"But the money won't last for ever."

"What then? There's more to be made. Heh, Zombi?" and she kicked off her slipper and caressed her black familiar with her small, bare foot. "We've had our bad times together. A feast to-day and the bare bones to pick to-morrow, when Morris has left us with five shillings to last us till he comes home again." Zombi winked appreciatively. "Now you are both going to be great gentlemen, English lords—with estates and an income and grand relations. Wait, only wait awhile. You believe in me, if no one else does."

Zombi rolled suddenly over and caught the bare foot with all his claws at once, and pretended to inflict a sharp bite. Then he got up and prowled restlessly.

His mistress dropped into sudden silence. Zombi ended by placing himself in front of her and uttering a short muffled cry once or twice. Then shaking her long hair down, so that it shrouded her face like a veil, she commenced a low monotonous croon in a language Elsie did not understand. It went on for many minutes, a melancholy chant with a constantly recurring burden.

At the first notes Zombi had risen and, stepping gravely, begun to pace round and round the bucket till Elsie grew dizzy with watching him, uttering his cry at intervals. Suddenly the song stopped, and he, too, stood motionless. Elsie dared not break the silence that followed. It fell on her like the touch of a cold hand in the warm exciting air of the place. Mrs. Beltran rose, and with bowed head and outstretched hands muttered what seemed a giving of thanks, and signed to Elsie to uncover the water.

There, on its surface, floated a flower-gem in its fairy boat, fresh, glowing, perfumed, and Elsie, with a cry, fell on her knees beside it.

"Take it," spoke Mrs. Beltran. "It will live—this one—till it has done its work."

Elsie seized it greedily, then raised her eyes from it to her friend's dark face alight with strange meaning. "Its work?" she demanded, doubtfully.

"Oh, no, I cannot take it!" she cried, with sudden energy. "How do I know what its work may be? Oh, forgive me. You are wise and strong, I am weak and ignorant, and I am frightened—I am frightened! Not of you only but of myself. I dare take no more from your hands. I am grateful from the depths of my heart for what you have already done, but no more, no more! Oh, forgive me, and take this back!"

She almost flung the flower at the feet of Mrs. Beltran, and walked resolutely to the door. Mrs. Beltran, gazing at her with a dull, lowering look, marked how her face flushed with pain though she kept back all other sign. Zombi gained the couch-back with a fierce, silent spring, his fur on end, his eyes giving out wicked sparks of green light.

At the door Elsie paused with her hand on the latch, but it was only to turn a piteous, childish face full of tears on her would-be benefactress, as if asking forgiveness for all offence, and then she went away.

Mrs. Beltran resumed her seat, her chin on her hands, her face inscrutable, except, perhaps, to Zombi, who placed himself in front of her, his green eyes on her velvet-black ones. Neither stirred till the cat gently extended his fore-paws to their utmost stretch and drew them back, the claws cutting and tearing the rug with a slow, savage enjoyment. Then his mistress cut her meditations short with a laugh and shrug of her shoulders, and, throwing herself back, settled herself to the contemplations of the good times to come, chanting to herself a jovial ditty, more curious than elegant, with a refrain of

"Hourre! Maringo! baisez-moi!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MAJOR RANDOLF STANNARD.

On the Friday following, the scanty congregation of St. Fridolin's had a reinforcement of one. A tall gentleman strode across the churchyard from the Vicarage, some time after the bell had stopped and the last tardy worshipper disappeared into the porch.

Once established in a pew, his behaviour, screened from the Vicar's notice by an interposing pillar, was not edifying, viewed as a model of church-going deportment. He stood and turned about as it pleased him, regarding the sacred edifice with a sort of proprietary interest, looking critically at the decorations, the congregation, and the clergyman, and finally, almost before the last words of the benediction had been uttered, seizing his hat and striding, with a lively and secular tread, straight up to the reading-desk with "Hillo! Eustace!"

"Randolf, my dear fellow!" and the surpliced Vicar took the intruder by the arm and impelled him into the vestry, where the door shut them off from the sight of the scandalised spectators.

The two men clasped hands warmly, and stood looking into one another's face with delight and affection beyond words, till Randolf enquired: "Am I in the way here? Any fair penitents about?"

"Nonsense!" said the Vicar, divesting himself of his surplice. "Come along. Where have you come from? How long have you been in town?"

"I came up by the early train and have been all over the place since. Agents, Stores, Truefitt's, every other shop in Regent Street and half over Westbourne Grove, hunting for some stuff that Amy wants. I made up my mind to get all her commissions cleared off first and come here in comfort."

Eustace hurried on to the Vicarage to announce his brother's arrival, but Mrs. Goodliffe had already seen Major Randolf, who was a prime favourite of hers, and guest-chamber and dinner were, he found, in an advanced stage of preparation. Returning to his study, he found Randolf standing with his back to the empty grate, looking around with a comical critical air.

"So these are your new diggings, eh? Rather different from St. Ermentrude's, where I left you. Do you mean to say you consider this promotion?"

"I think I was right in coming here," said his brother, sedately. "I am very well satisfied."

"Oh, well, you know best. It doesn't strike me as the right thing by any means. Eldest sons have no business to be parsons. I can't think what my father was about to make one of you. At any rate there should be some reasonable system of promotion that would give you a chance of retiring as a bishop—or, well, come—an arch-

deacon by the time you come into the property. It would be only decent."

"There was no question of the title, you remember, at the time when I decided to take orders, and I should have done the same in any case. Never mind me. Tell me about yourself and Amy. Is she at Malta?"

"No, of course not! I brought her home a fortnight ago. We ought to have been in England a month sooner, but there was something going on that Amy *would* stay for. As usual, she overdid it and was awfully bad. I thought I should never get her to England alive. Her mother came to us at Southsea, and uncommonly glad I was to see her. Well, the affair is over at last, thank goodness!"

The Vicar looked up with an awakened face. "Do you mean to say ——?"

"Of course I do. Didn't I write and tell you about the baby? Such a jolly little beggar! No? I suppose I didn't as it only arrived four days ago. I really had no time for anything but looking after Amy before it came."

"Have you told them at Altcar?"

"Well, no, I haven't. I shall see them on Monday. I want to stay with you till then, if you'll have me, and I thought it would save bother if I kept it quiet till we met. My mother will be agitating for details you know, and I'd rather be shot than write anything longer than a post-card. I wanted to telegraph, only Amy wouldn't, as it was only a girl."

"A girl?"

"Didn't I say so? Awfully disappointing—at least, Amy feels it. I'm just as pleased, but she, poor little woman, had set her heart on its being a boy; and, in fact, was rather hurt that my father didn't expect her to come to Altcar—for it to be born there, you know."

"My mother's state of health," Eustace began, apologetically.

"Oh, yes, I know, but Amy said when it was a question of the birth of the heir ——"

Major Stannard stopped suddenly in some confusion, which his brother covered by a suggestion about preparing for dinner, and conducted him upstairs, smiling to himself rather grimly. There was a strong likeness between the brothers, as they sat facing one another in the lamp-light at the small round table. That Major Stannard's hair was lighter and crisper, his mouth covered by a heavy blond moustache, and his eyes round and boyish, instead of deep-set and thoughtful, seemed absolutely the only points of difference except that of expression; and that was less striking when Eustace brightened up at his brother's presence, or the recollection of Amy's sufferings toned down Randolf's high spirits.

The consciousness of the slip of the tongue into which he had been betrayed was still present with the Major. He glanced once or twice at his brother, doubtfully, and at last put down his knife and fork and began apologetically.

"I say, you know, Eustace, I didn't really mean anything by what I said just now. You won't take it amiss, will you? Of course, we all know *you* may marry any day, and uncommonly glad I shall be to hear it; and then, naturally, it will be all up with our boy's prospects ——"

"Your *boy?* I thought you said a girl."

"Yes, yes, this child is certainly a girl; but a boy may come any day, and Amy says she really cannot settle her mind till she knows what your views really are, she is sure they are *far* too strict to allow of your marrying. Now, I don't say that, and should be uncommonly sorry to hear it."

"I have taken no vows of celibacy, if that is what you mean," began Eustace, slowly.

"That's right. Glad to hear it," interrupted Randolf, cordially.

"But there may be other reasons. Did my father ever suggest as much to you?" he asked, suddenly and sharply.

"Not a word. He seemed pretty clear of your intentions, though, now I come to think of it. But I expect he'd be just as pleased as anyone, when it came to the point, to see you settled, with a jolly little wife of your own—like Amy for instance." Eustace gave a private shudder of negation. "Dear little woman! Ah, you've only seen her ill and out of sorts"—possibly detecting his brother's lack of enthusiasm—"but when things go right with her, you've no idea what a fascinating, sweet little thing she is."

Eustace had pushed aside his untasted plate, and sat out the rest of the meal in almost total silence. Randolf ran on gaily, taking his brother's attention for granted. It was long since they had met—more than three years, except for a brief space one day about a year ago, when Eustace had run down to Southsea to make his sister-in-law's acquaintance between the arrival of a down and the departure of an up-train. He drifted on to politics at last; Egypt; the attitude of France and Turkey; all the possibilities of the day.

"We shall be in the fun at any rate," Randolf said, casually. "They can't do our regiment out of that."

Eustace started and dropped the glass he was holding with a crash. "What! *You?* I never thought of that. You going on active service?"

Randolf looked with amused contempt on his brother's alarmed face. "Of course. What then?"

"You ought not to go, Randolf. Some arrangement must be made —some exchange effected."

"What bosh! Do you quite understand what you are talking about, my dear boy? I think I see myself exchanging just now! Supposing every officer began to take care of himself, and go home directly war was declared ——"

"I know—I know—but yours is an exceptional case. If you were the eldest son, with much depending on your life —— "

"Which, thank heaven, I am not. I've thought so all my life. I'm fond enough of Altcar and the old folks, but to be tied by the leg to a place—ugh!"

"But as a married man."

"Well, if *that* interfered, it would drive me to wish myself unmarried almost, and I don't know how I can put it stronger."

"Are you sure that your regiment will be sent?"

"It's bound to be, and, to tell you the truth, that's why I wanted to get my poor girl safe to England with her friends."

"Does she know the possibility?"

"Why, I couldn't keep it from her, could I? She behaves splendidly about it. We had a dreadful scene at first. She was in hysterics for two days because I couldn't promise to take her with me; but now that's over we can settle things comfortably. She has lots of friends in Southsea who will keep her amused and won't let her fret. Of course it will be an anxious time, but she needn't mope more than she can help."

"She had better go to Altcar. I am sure they will be glad to have her. That will be the fittest home for her and the child—if you have to leave them."

"So I thought, but she says it would be too trying. If my father and mother get anxious about me she never could bear up, she is sure. A quiet, sad house like that would kill her. She thought they might like to take the baby. There really isn't much room in the Southsea house, and when I go she must have some people to stay with her. She cannot bear being left for a day——" Randolf broke off and looked earnestly across the table at his brother, who had sunk into a brown study. "I wonder—won't you—I don't think you did see Amy at her best," he went on, incoherently, "and, perhaps, you don't understand how full of real feeling she is. I wish you did," wistfully. "It would be a good thing for me, Eustace, if I never come back again, to know that there is someone to stand by the little woman. She *can't* bear trouble or sorrow. It's no use finding fault with her for her nature. She feels things more than other people, you see, and if I'm not with her to help her, she'll die. Won't you promise me to do all you can for her—and—and—to be a little patient with her? I tell you, Eustace, it makes me *mad* to think of having to leave her all alone, to fight her own battles, my poor dependent Amy!"

Randolf's broad chest gave a great heave, and he dropped his face on his hand. Eustace rose and stood beside him, his hand on his shoulder.

"You did not need to ask me this, Randolf. Who is nearer to me in the world than you? God grant your dear ones may be spared the need of my care and have you safe home again."

Randolf smiled up at him. "You have always been the best of good fellows, Eustace. I wonder how many scrapes you have pulled me through in my time?"

"I wonder how many times you have been tempted to knock me down for an interfering prig. You've had an uncommon lot of patience and forbearance with me in your day, I suspect."

Then they both laughed, and, lighting up their cigars, stepped out into the fresh June night and sat on the big tombstone, talking by snatches or enjoying one another's presence in silence—a significant sign of good understanding—till the great June moon sank behind the chimney pots.

Major Randolf's plans for a long day's holiday with his brother only survived the arrival of the first post next morning.

"How do you get to Richmond?" he asked, suddenly.

"You go to Waterloo to begin with. What do you want there?"

"It's a hideous nuisance, but I've got to go, it seems. Some friends of Amy's live there. People she took a fancy to on the P. and O. steamer coming home. She's gone and written to them to arrange that I shall go down and see them this afternoon; dine there, possibly. Confound their civility."

"Telegraph an excuse."

"That won't do either. Amy thinks she'd like to go and stay with them some day, and I'm to suggest it if they seem open to the idea. Don't you see?"

The Vicar did see, and bowed to the decrees of Fate and the Hon. Mrs. Stannard. "We must make the most of the morning then. What shall we do?"

The poor Major's face lengthened dolorously. "Here's another nuisance. Amy says I must get home by Thursday, so that cuts off the day I meant to have in town after Altcar. I've a lot to do about uniform and things of that sort, so I've only got to-day to do it in. It's no good asking you to come with me to Richmond, is it? Amy suggests that the Maxwells will be charmed to see you if I take you down, but I don't know——"

"Certainly not." Eustace promptly disposed of this cool suggestion. "I think I can devise a better plan. I must go down to Altcar at once. I—I have a special reason. I can start this morning and you can come down straight from Richmond. We can spend Sunday together there as well as here, and I can come up by the early train on Monday."

"Better than nothing," assented the Major, who was still perusing his wife's letter with a bothered air.

"Amy is quite well, I hope, and the baby?" Eustace enquired.

"All right. She asks after you, sends her love, you know, and says—how women's heads *do* run on marriage!" broke off Randolf, with an impatient laugh. "I suppose I can tell her you have nothing of the sort at present in view? It would really compose her mind, she says, and save her all that she went through before this baby was born, if she quite knew your intentions; so as to know how to look upon the boy—when he comes."

"I am afraid I can give her no comfort," spoke Eustace, in a tone that made his brother look up astonished. "The question will be decided for me before very long, I daresay. Whichever way it is decided will be final; and I can promise to let her know with all speed. Will that pacify her mind—until the heir is born?"

If there were a sneer latent in the last words Major Stannard did not detect it, merely giving an approving nod and a murmured "Good luck to you, my boy," with an emphatic shake of his broad shoulders, as if he felt them lightened of the burden of Amy's last and weightiest commission.

Then he departed to his tailor's, leaving his brother to arrange for the next day's services.

"*To-morrow!*" exclaimed Lionel de Cressy when informed of the change. "Shall you be away to-morrow?"

"I have a particular reason for wishing to be at Altcar with my brother, or I should not think of leaving you just now."

"Oh, it's not that. We shall get on right enough. I was thinking of Mrs. Damien. You know she is going away?"

Eustace nodded, apparently intent on the papers on his writing-table.

"I told you, didn't I, that I met her at Lady Vesey's concert, and she said she wanted to say good-bye to her girls after Evensong."

"Yes. And then?" queried the Vicar, still impassive.

"She said, you know, that she hoped she should see you then. It was her last chance, she said. She seemed to make quite a point of my telling you so," said the Curate, enviously. "Won't it look rather marked if you don't leave some message, or write or call?"

Lionel had got rather into the way of regarding his Vicar as a sort of venerable hermit; to be revered for his wisdom and virtues, but also occasionally to be guided and enlightened as to the customs of the outer world.

"I shall not forget," Mr. Stannard answered, with a repressed smile playing round the corners of his mouth. "I will certainly write or call. You may be sure I shall not let Mrs. Damien leave England without my seeing her."

"You ought to call on a Monday; that is the day to find her at home," said the Curate, still in his capacity of mentor, and then left the Vicar to his preparations for his journey.

The smile soon faded from Eustace's lips, and the dark shadow that his brother's words had raised settled down on his face again. He rested his head on his hands, as if wearied with long and anxious thought. The morning had brought him no nearer to the solution of the difficulties over which he had vexed himself the night through.

On his table lay a pile of letters unfolded and arranged in order of their dates. Under his hand, while de Cressy had been speaking, lay another which he had selected from the rest. They were all in

the same writing—a man's hand—bold and clear, with a family likeness to his own endorsement, "Letters from my Father, 1872—1879."

He took them up, one by one, and looked over them afresh, as if hoping that morning's light might bring him some new insight. They were excellent letters to read. More like those of an elder brother than a father—supposing an elder brother should ever put himself out of the way to make his letters specially welcome. Full of keen interest in Eustace's own doings, with a few useful hints and morsels of worldly wisdom dropped here and there casually, and with no affectation of superiority. Bits of home news, gossip social and political, graphic descriptions of the writer's own experiences. Eustace broke off, almost overcome by the recollection of how welcome it had all been once upon a time. They extended through the years of his Oxford life and his first curacy, and were signed "E. Redgrave Stannard."

The last was signed "Altcar," and contained the problem, the key to which he had been vainly searching throughout all the rest.

"This must and shall be explained before I go further. It has been sheer cowardice not to have insisted on an understanding sooner. Not altogether cowardice," he went on, defending himself against himself. "It's not altogether cowardice that makes me shrink from accusing my dear old father of senseless, unjust caprice; from facing the fact that I have been supplanted by my younger brother—all unknowingly, good old fellow. I am not afraid of an explanation. It cannot be worse than the facts which I have already accepted."

His time was flying. He hastily put away his letters, all but the one, which he carefully secured in his pocket-book.

"I am better off than many an Esau," he said to himself, with sudden, irrepressible bitterness. "I have had no choice in the disposal of my birthright, and I am offered a handsome sum down in commutation of the blessing."

(*To be continued.*)

PAUL SMITH, A.R.A.

I.

THE morning sun was streaming into a large wainscoted room, filling it with beauty, shining through the small panes of three tall narrow windows, severely draped in Syrian muslin curtains.

Outside, the Thames flowed on, past the old Chelsea wooden bridge, spanning it, in a glory of dazzling, sparkling light.

The furniture in the room had an old-world look. But that comfort was not sacrificed to appearance was shown in the somewhat unwieldy Indian-cane lounging chairs and a couch, made beautiful by a gold embroidered cashmere shawl covering it. Persian rugs and soft and glossy furs gave tone and colour to the plain golden-coloured panels of the room. At the further end a fine piece of old tapestry, partly drawn aside, screened off a smaller room, lighted by a window of olive-green glass, showing a narrow door in the wainscot, leading, it might be, to a deep cupboard, or a passage communicating with the corridor. Yellow daffodils, in quaint Japanese bronze pots, delicious bits of blue and white, vividly coloured fans, dashed here and there in bright flashes, amid the various objects of art, were hardly needed to show that it was an artist's home.

The studio was further embellished by the occupants, two young men. One, the owner, was smoking while his facile pencil rapidly sketched on a small wooden block, listening the while to his companion's talk. For Paul Smith, although ambitious of better things, was industrious and could ill afford to waste time. Pending the arrival of the expected model for his important picture on the easel, he was finishing one of the numerous orders for a popular magazine.

The tall Chippendale timepiece struck ten as he impatiently exclaimed: "Isabel's late this morning. Strange! As a rule she is the most dependable of women."

"Are women ever to be depended upon?" his friend, the Honourable Hugo Somerville, asked, gazing absently at the picture on the easel.

"*She* is. Glad you seem to like my picture. Do you care to see the lines it illustrates?" And the artist handed an open book over to Somerville; who, having been attaché at St. Petersburg and other foreign Courts, was sufficiently well up to understand the verses written in old French; he read aloud:

"A vostre maîtresse envoys
Ce qu'elle mande; mais pour moy,
Gaarde le parfum de la rose,
Y en mon cuer le tiens enclose."

"Quaint and pretty," he said. Then turning again to the picture, he added: "And now for your translation of it."

Paul Smith pointing to the centre figure with his mahlstick, began in an oratorial tone: "Here you behold the late charmer of his faithless majesty, Francis I. Le roi gallant, in defiance of the maxim to be off with the old love, &c., sends, at a woman's instigation, of course, for the love tokens and jewels he had given his old flame."

"And pray who was the old love?" Hugo asked, interrupting his friend's flow of eloquence.

"Françoise de Foix, Comtesse de Châteaubriant. And as you may observe, she obeyed his Majesty's command, but returns them in a grand smash, worthless as his affection: a sentiment embodied in the neat lines you have been reading. There's not another girl in London with such a head of hair: the true Old Master shade. Leonardo should have painted her instead of the arch-sinner Francis.

"Magnificent! And a lovely face. Haven't you flattered her? Hasn't she freckles?"

"No!" Paul replied honestly. "I couldn't flatter her if I tried; she is simply beautiful. Look at her photo, there; even without colour it is lovely."

Hugo Somerville took a portrait from the looking-glass, and gave it a long serious gaze. "Perfect," he exclaimed at length.

"Yes! and she's as good as she's perfect," Paul continued. "For when I was down with typhoid fever last year, that girl nursed me like a mother. She had been a hospital nurse for a few months and was up to the work; she pulled me through too. Sir William Carstairs said he could do nothing; all depended upon my constitution, and upon nursing and care. I owe my life to her."

"Of course you'll pay your debt and marry her, live happily ever after, and so end—or begin—the romance."

"It would end the romance indeed, my dear fellow! I can't afford it."

"Why, it would pay in the long run; she'd sit to you gratis. Marry her. I would, if I were you."

"If I were *you*, I might; the Honourable Hugo Somerville may indulge in matrimonial eccentricities; but I owe it to the time-honoured name of Smith to be more particular. An imprudent marriage would ruin my career."

"Is she common?" Hugo enquired eagerly.

"No! uncommon enough—one of Nature's gentlewomen, though I believe her father was a gentleman. But I want the happy combination of Nature and Art—allied to wealth."

"I should go in for such a combination as I see here, and leave destiny to take care of itself," cried Somerville, touching the photo, as he spoke, almost reverently.

Smith laughed. "There goes the door! She'll be in directly, and you can judge for yourself."

Rising, he drew the portière aside, and looked into the small room. It was empty. Opening the door, he looked beyond into the passage. No one. He returned and remarked, in a disappointed tone: "Isabel has not come, yet I was sure I heard the door close. I must have been mistaken."

Somerville felt equally sure, but said nothing.

Reluctantly he stuck the photo again in the corner of the glass, after carefully noticing the address scrawled in pencil at the back. He suddenly remembered an important engagement, and hurriedly left the artist.

Paul remained plunged in a brown study, which, if put into words, would have been to the effect, that however charming Isabel Gray might be, it behoved him to marry for something more than love. Money or rank: the one would add to his comfort, the other, to his popularity as a fashionable portrait painter, the summit of his ambition. Looking at the luxuries surrounding him; remembering the high rent he paid for the studio and the low state of his finances; the hand to mouth life he led; a visionary account at his banker's, existing only in the imagination of his fellow Bohemians; remembering all this, he knew how little he could afford to indulge in that luxury of the wealthy—a love match!

Pshaw! With the thought the image of Isabel arose, and "the tender grace of a day that is dead"—her devoted care of him in that serious illness. True, he was unconscious of the extent of her sacrifice; the necessaries she deprived herself of to minister to his comfort, to procure the little luxuries tempting to an invalid's sickly appetite; the weary days, the broken nights, passed at his bedside. These were only vaguely known to him, chiefly comprehended in Sir William's memorable verdict: "You owe your life to your nurse."

He could not forget the succeeding days when convalescence had set in; the short country excursions, Isabel's bright happiness. Holidays that left pleasant memories. Walks under the magnificent chestnuts in Bushey Park, and the stately Limes, shading the clear stream peopled with large speckled trout, in the Palace gardens. Windsor Castle and the Park; and Isabel's childish delight as a brilliantly plumed cock pheasant majestically crossed their path, or a partridge whirred past them, rising in startled flight from amid the bracken. Sometimes her mother would accompany them in these excursions, but often they were alone. How she revelled in the country, hating her London prison! yet, how bravely she had worked and toiled to keep her widowed mother! And now, as a friendless orphan—her mother had lately died—she was steadily doing her duty, fighting bravely through the many troubles and temptations to which her calling more particularly exposed her.

With a trifle of unwonted tenderness, he recalled the silvery tones of her voice, uneducated, but sweet and true as a bird's song. Poor Isabel! Was it love that taught her those soft modulations?

Slowly he puffed out the smoke, idly watching it float into thin air, carrying away with it the sweet thoughts of the past. The pipe finished, he laid it aside, and with it, his dream of what might have been. Resolutely he went once more to work; and the drawing finished, dashed off a few words of inquiry to Isabel. Ringing for his servant, he gave him the letter for Miss Gray and the block, to be left at their respective destinations.

Upon receiving them, the man said Miss Gray had called by appointment, but feeling indisposed, had gone home.

"Why did you not give me the message at once?" Smith inquired with a growl.

"I thought Miss Gray had seen you, sir. She went upstairs and said it was of no consequence, as you had a gentleman with you."

With these words the servant hastily fled, leaving Paul in a far from amiable mood.

"Marry her!" The words haunted him. He missed her, and without her would work no more. Reluctantly taking his hat, he went to the Row, only to acknowledge that amid the throng of highborn beauties not one surpassed the girl he was seeking to dismiss from his thoughts.

On his return he was surprised to realise the eagerness with which he looked for the reply to his note; the blank feeling of disappointment upon his servant telling him there was no answer.

The following morning he called at Fitzroy Street. Miss Gray was "not at home." He went off in a huff, and sulked for two days, painting in the draperies from the lay figure. Then, artistic despair compelled him to knock under. He wrote in almost abject terms to Isabel, convinced of a favourable reply. The letter was returned with the words "Gone away."

Paul Smith hardly knew whether he was more grieved or annoyed as he repeated aloud, "Gone away!"

II.

Some nine or ten years have passed away. Paul Smith, A.R.A., stands, if not on the very pinnacle of fame, at least in a fair way to lessen by one the three magic initials attached to his name.

Clever and the fashion, his portraits are in demand, and if to the chosen few the stamp of genius be wanting, none can deny his success in catching the likeness of his sitters, and his seizing upon the happy moment when they are looking their best, as he puts it, or by grossly flattering them, as his detractors—and they are many—put it. Envious enemies, and adverse critics are but another proof, if any be wanting, of his success.

He had made art pay. A windfall in an unlooked-for legacy had enabled him to build up for himself a comfortable fortune, and a gorgeous red-brick mongrel Queen Anne palace, among the palatial shrines in that eminent painters' corner, clustering together on the outskirts of a well-known historical park. A park under whose time-

honoured trees Addison and his fair patroness walked and talked and held their court : a bright constellation of wit and beauty, around whom innumerable lesser satellites revolved.

The studio itself is a marvellous reproduction of a Damascus room. It is rich in curiously carven wooden lattices and screens, walls and arched recesses, whereon gorgeous mosaic and brilliantly coloured texts from the Koran shine out in a maze of lustrous splendour. The whole is toned down by the subdued tints of rich Oriental draperies falling in soft folds from under the horseshoe arched doorway.

Magnificent Indian rugs cover a low, broad divan, filling a deep recess. In front of these stand low tables inlaid with pearl and ivory, while from the fretted ceiling hang silver lamps, ostrich eggs and the various accessories that eastern imagination and skill can devise, plus "an ebon slave." A Hindu, who hands the fragrant coffee in rare china cups, in silver jewelled stands, or the picturesque narghileh or amber-mouthed chibouque.

The place of honour is given to the unfinished picture—"Love Tokens," whence Isabel Gray's luminous eyes shine out in reproachful, indignant scorn, in the ill-starred Françoise de Foix. The morning sun brings out the lustre of the ruddy golden hair.

Once again two men are seated in the studio : Paul and a friend, John Graham, an artist, less successful than himself. Paul is holding up a water-colour drawing and surveying it indulgently, albeit critically. It was the sketch of a girl in a fanciful peasant dress, crowned with a wreath of hawthorn.

"I rather think this 'May Queen' will fetch the fair lady. Lady May Bramston asked me to draw a pretty get-up for her to wear at the Duchess of Cloverly's ball."

"Ah!" said his friend. "By the time your artistic design passes through the dressmaker's hands you won't recognise your own sketch. Lady May? I thought you were going in for December, *not* May?"

This was in allusion to a certain wealthy, if somewhat mature, widowed countess, whose open partiality for the artist was the talk of the clubs.

Paul, not ill-pleased at the insinuation, replied : "May is the month for our profession ; when we are hanged, skied, or rejected! But apropos of December ——"

He opened a portfolio, and taking out a drawing in coloured chalks, passed it to Graham.

"Norma. That's for the Countess of Steynham, Lady May's aunt, who goes in for High Art and the classics."

Graham, honestly admiring and secretly enjoying his brother artist's talent, inquired :

"And which do you go in for, Ancient or Modern?"

Ignoring the innuendo, Paul answered severely :

"Modern, and I am off now to the Private View. Of course we shall meet?"

"No such luck. You forget I'm one of the 'rejected'."

"Pardon me, old fellow! Better luck next time."

As he spoke, the successful man cordially grasped his friend's hand, infusing a delicate shade of sympathy in his tone and a warm pressure of his fingers. Graham, flattered and pleased, took the hint, and left.

Paul carefully rolled up the drawings, and, addressing them respectively to the Countess of Steynham and the Lady May Bramston, lighted a pipe, and proceeding to smoke it, built up as fragile and glittering a castle as any in cloudland.

III.

THE Private View at the Academy was crowded as ever, spite of the additional accommodation afforded by the spacious rooms of the new building. R. A.s and A. R. A.s and a host of budding and as yet undecorated artists mingled with the gay throng of butterfly beauties. These were arrayed in all the glories of the rainbow; draped in "arrangements" of every variety of fashion, past, present or to come, from the Conquest down to the days of our own good and gracious Queen.

Paul was irresistibly drawn to his own picture, a portrait of Lady May Bramston. It was well hung, although above the line. Standing before it was a tall and graceful woman, from under whose small black bonnet a gleam of burnished golden hair escaped. The artist's quick eye noted the effect of the sunlight in bringing out the warm tones.

"First rate back study," he reflected, as he waited patiently to see if the front view were equally good.

Turning slightly to refer to the catalogue, he saw an oval face, with clear, well cut, straight features, a pure colourless complexion, dark curling lashes fringing the downcast eyes, conscious of and annoyed at his admiring gaze. A faint colour slowly rose in her cheeks, adding marvellous brightness and life to the hitherto statuesque beauty. She had apparently found the artist's name, when, looking up, their eyes met, hers with a startled look in them. The rosy flush died out of the face, and as she abruptly turned away, a jewelled pencil dropped from her trembling fingers. Paul stooped and, raising his hat, restored it to her. Silently, she bowed her thanks and passed on. What haunting likeness was there in the face, what vague resemblance, recalling a long since lost and forgotten memory?

Isabel Gray—yes—she, the poor model, might have been like this majestic beauty, this glorious woman—had she, too, been happy, rich, and in a similar position.

From room to room he followed her, as, looking straight before her, heedless of the crowd, she hurried on.

In his eager pursuit he stumbled over a gorgeous peacock-feather-

trimmed train. An ominous rent was the result, as with an abject apology he sought to free himself from the hopelessly involved draperies. He was tearing the train and himself away, when the indignant wearer confronted him.

"Lady Steynham!"

The angry frown at his awkwardness subsided, the dark face lighted up with a pleasant smile, an outstretched many-buttoned lavender hand was extended in friendly greeting.

"Don Pablo!" she exclaimed. The foreign title conferred upon Paul by the fair widow was a tribute to his eminently Spanish appearance, artistically enhanced by the picturesque style he affected. "I am delighted to see you. I've been longing for an intelligent and sympathetic guide through this bewildering labyrinth of genius and beauty. How fortunate! Never mind the gown; these damages are easily repaired. Hush! not a word."

She gathered up the folds of the train, and resting her hand lightly on his arm, continued:

"Take me to see your picture. I am dying to know if they have done justice to your genius, and May's beauty."

The unlucky man was buttonholed, and when at last, pleading an important engagement, he made his escape, the fair unknown had vanished. Inquiries of the man at the turnstile resulted in the information that a lady answering to his description had just passed through. He dashed down the stairs, too late. A victoria was driven away as he reached the door, and as it turned into Piccadilly he had a vision of a lovely profile and a gleam of golden hair.

IV.

In the Countess of Steynham's boudoir three people were merrily chatting over their afternoon tea. The subject under discussion was an entertainment to be given at Steynham House, for which cards were to be issued forthwith. Lady May Bramston was begging for a fancy dress ball; her aunt, Lady Steynham, was in favour of tableaux, and Paul Smith was specially called upon to decide between the ladies.

"I feel my responsible position as umpire," he was saying, adroitly deciding to please both if possible. "I should advise a series of tableaux, illustrating the progress of Art."

Lady Steynham looked delighted; Lady May disappointed, when Paul continued:

"Concluding with a costume ball. We could start with a classical subject, either a single figure or a group—say 'Pygmalion and Galatea,' then by a long step, on to Preraphaelitism—a Madonna, by Licinio, or better still—'Monna Lisa.' Mediæval Art could be fairly shown by Albert Dürer's 'Melancholia,' whence Holbein, Vandyck, and Rubens would gently lead to the English School, Gainsborough, Reynolds, a Hogarth, perhaps, and so on to our own period."

Lady Steynham interrupted laughingly.

"I must veto the whole thing. It is too long, too much, and too artistic for the general public. As hostess, I must consider my guests."

"Oh, aunt!" Lady May observed piteously, while Paul looked annoyed.

"If you like to have, say one or two tableaux as a lever de rideau, May shall have her wish, and we will decide upon a costume ball."

She addressed the last words to Paul, adding with a gracious smile: "We will put up your large picture, the woman with the red hair and the broken ornaments: that unfinished one that hangs in your studio."

"Willingly," replied Paul. "It will make an excellent tableau. But who will sit for the fair dame?"

As he put the question, a vision rose before him of the beautiful unknown.

"If we could only get Lady Somerville—she has just that shade of red hair," said May.

"Lady Somerville," Paul inquired; "who is she? Years ago I knew a brother of Lord Somerville; he died in India, or was it Canada? He was attaché somewhere in the frigid or the torrid zone."

"It's the same. He inherited the title, married, and died abroad. His wife was an Australian, very rich; all over diamonds and nuggets. You must have met her; she is very lovely." Lady May spoke with the generous enthusiasm of youth; her aunt adding as a rider: "And *not* very young."

"She doesn't look more than twenty," the young girl replied; "though of course she is more If only she would come, the tableaux would be perfect. But you don't know her, aunt."

"Silly child! what has that to do with it? Si c'est impossible cela se fera. Give me another cup of tea and don't trouble about my affairs. I undertake that Lady Somerville shall play the Beauty, and Don Pablo shall be the Messenger. And don't lose your heart, for I hear she's engaged to Lord Duncan Glenholm."

Paul assured the ladies that he was arrow proof, with a look and expression that conveyed to his hearers the idea that they, individually, were his protecting ægis from love's wiles. And having conveyed the desired impression, he left.

V.

Lady Steynham succeeded in her aim. She was introduced to Lady Somerville, and she prevailed upon her to undertake a part in the tableaux; this was, however, only upon condition that rehearsals were dispensed with. Lady Somerville requesting a photograph of the picture. In vain Lady Steynham suggested a visit to the studio. Lady Somerville declared "she hated artists, as they expected so much flattery and adulation;" and the Countess, only too happy to secure the Beauty, willingly acceded to the terms she mentally voted capricious.

Some days later, meeting Lady Somerville at a ball, she was delighted to present the artist to her.

"Lady Somerville, allow me to introduce Mr. Paul Smith: our collaborateur, you know, in the tableaux."

Lady Somerville acknowledged the introduction by a slight bow.

"May I have the honour of the next valse?" Paul asked, eagerly.

"Thank you, I never valse."

The answer was not encouraging, and the tone still less so, but the voice was wonderfully sweet.

"The next quadrille?"

"I am engaged."

"The lancers?"

She shook her head and turned away.

"Have you no dance to give me?" he persisted.

"I am afraid not," she answered carelessly enough, smiling the while upon a gentleman evidently seeking to make his way to her through the crowd. As he approached, Paul recognised Lord Duncan Glenholm. Claiming his dance, he led her away with empressement to a quadrille just forming.

Anxiously and enviously, Paul watched the two. A well matched couple; she, leaning on his arm with willowy, bending grace; he, tall, fair, and broad-shouldered: a fine type of power and strength that could not but find favour in the artist's eye. This then, was fortune's favourite, the man who had won the wealthy widow.

He was in no mood to dance. The discovery that Lady Somerville was the fair unknown had been a blow to any hope he might have had of winning the one woman who realised his ideal of grace and beauty. Less rich, less courted, he might have had a chance; but now—his gaze followed her, he was wholly absorbed in watching every movement, every turn of the fair face, every glance of the wonderful eyes that never met his own. Was it chance or did she purposely avoid him?

He determined to be convinced. Henceforth, all his energies should be devoted to solving the enigma. Sphinx that she was, he would read and unravel the mystery. The rehearsals at Steynham House would be in his favour. Fervently he blessed Lady Steynham for casting him in the unimportant part of messenger in his picture with Lady Somerville.

However, he was doomed herein to disappointment, and had to await the eventful night.

In the meanwhile he sought her wherever she was likely to be met. Occasionally they passed in the Row, or he saw her driving or riding in the park; and he was fain to be content with the slightest of bows, or the very few words that politeness required in recognition, it might be, of some trifling service he was only too happy to render.

Had Lady Somerville desired to make him more completely her slave, she could not have acted with greater judgment. The chains of

her fascination, slight in the beginning, were weighing on him and binding him, a willing captive at her feet. Nettled and fascinated, Paul Smith's admiration was rapidly drifting into passionate and intense love, and the one object of his hitherto objectless life was to win her affection.

The fête at Steynham house came off in due time. The daily papers called it "a colossal success," and gave unmitigated praise to the three tableaux preceding the ball.

"King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," the first given, was remarkably successful in reproducing the elaborate detail of the celebrated picture; and after the curtain had risen and fallen twice upon it, was followed by Millais' "Huguenots."

Lady Steynham had secured Mr. Beauchamp, a bachelor and a wealthy brewer, as an eligible representative of her niece's lover; trusting to his fortune to make up for any shortcomings. Lady May looked the part to perfection. The ensemble was enhanced by real ivy trailing over the well imitated wall, and the flaming nasturtium and bluebell.

The gem of the evening was undeniably the last—"Love Tokens," by the fashionable and popular artist, Paul Smith, in which, he himself appeared as the king's messenger, and the beautiful Lady Somerville as the ill-starred Françoise. Upon the black draperies of the background, the masses of ruddy, golden hair shone out in a flood of glory, as, with imperious gesture, she points to a glittering heap of broken jewels at her feet, the abject messenger of the king cowering beneath the outraged woman's scorn.

Now, and not until now, had Paul realised the truth. Seeing her in the well-remembered costume, it flashed upon him Lady Somerville and Isabel Gray were one and the same—the model, whose love and devotion he had lost; he would not admit, even to himself, that he had despised it. His eyes met hers with a look of burning love. At that look of recognition hers fell, the colour rose ominously in her pale cheeks, and as suddenly faded away; her lips parted in a faint sigh. Swaying forward, she would have fallen, but for Paul, who rushed with outstretched arms to save her.

To the loud applause succeeded a sudden hush. The curtain was dropped. Lady Steynham was quickly on the scene; promptly giving the necessary directions. The guests were reassured, Lady Somerville's faintness attributed to the heat, and after a few moments, the curtain rose again upon the interrupted tableau.

Paul longed to be alone with her. His heart was beating high with hopes of forgiveness: surely she could not be indifferent to the lover of her youth. Would the curtain never drop! At last, amid the sound of deafening applause, it fell; the tableaux were over; he was free to seek her. She did not enter the ball-room, but eluded him, and he and the admiring spectators looked for her in vain.

The following day Lady Somerville's house was besieged by callers : all London left cards of inquiry.

Among others, Paul Smith, who, hearing she was better, ventured to call again later in the afternoon. He was told, " Her ladyship had left town."

VI.

Isabel had sought safety in flight. Why ? He had discovered her secret. What then ? As he asked himself, a smile flitted across his face. She was afraid. Of whom ? Herself !

Paul Smith had recognised her, and the selfsame moment she had discovered the secret of her love. She fled, carrying with her, indeed, the vision of revenge she had planned, overwhelmed in the joy that filled her heart. She was but a loving, pitiful woman, incapable of the scornful rejection of the love she longed for and which was now humbly laid at her feet, to be refused—rejected. Trembling for herself and her weakness, she fled ; but only to return. Yearning to see him again, after some days' wearying, she plunged once more into the gaieties of town.

Her well-known equipage and lovely face were seen in the park. And although she fought against her love and denied herself to Paul, invariably being " not at home " to him, a day came when she could no longer refuse the interview he asked. In answer to his letter he was ushered into a prettily furnished room. Through a glass door, opening upon a small garden, he saw Isabel's slender figure in softly falling white drapery. With slightly heightened colour, she entered and greeted him.

There was a moment of embarrassing silence. She was the first to recover her composure, as seeking to release her hand from his, she murmured :

" Mr. Smith, I hope —— "

What she hoped, he never asked. Covering the hand he held imprisoned in his own with kisses, he, in burning words, besought her forgiveness, and more than that, her love.

With a fluttering movement, she sought to withdraw her hand from his firm grasp, then suddenly she let it lie passive in his. He looked up. The shadow of a smile dimpled the corners of her mouth, as she softly uttered : " This to me, the despised model ! "

Encouraged by the tone of her voice he attempted to fold her in his loving arms ; but with a forbidding gesture she drew back.

" Isabel, don't send me away from you ! All these long years I have wanted you, and my lonely heart has ached for the love that was lost to me. And now that I am more worthy of you—now—you will not refuse to let me call you mine ? "

" Mr. Smith, you are paying me the highest compliment in offering me the hand and heart you refused to Isabel Gray. You can more fittingly bestow it on Lord Somerville's widow : I shall not disgrace

you as a wife. Hush!" she continued, as he sought to interrupt her. "Hear me out. That day—so long ago—I called at the studio, and accidentally overheard your conversation with Hugo Somerville. Determined that you should not have the chance of spoiling your life by marrying me, I went away and changed my address. Your friend found me out, and by his goodness and chivalry won me.—And now it may be as well to be clear upon one point, an important one. That is, that, wealthy as I am reputed, in marrying again, the only fortune I bring my husband is—myself, Isabel Somerville, née Gray. The Somerville estates and moneys pass from my hands, leaving them empty."

With a pretty and beseeching gesture, she opened her hands towards him, drawing them back hastily as he stretched out his own.

"I am sure you do not care for a penniless bride, any more than I care to be a burden to the man I may wish to marry."

Again she held out her hand, with quiet dignity, saying only the words "Good-bye."

How would he bear the ordeal, she asked herself. To her intense joy, his countenance remained unchanged, he betrayed no disappointment. He was prepared to make any sacrifice to win her. Clasping her hand in both his own, he answered her Good-bye.

"Better so, my darling; I want you, yourself, not your surroundings. Thank Heaven, I have more than enough for both, and you shall never miss the luxuries which have been yours. You shall never regret giving yourself to me. I would rather you owed something to me, Isabel."

His voice was earnest and truthful, and his eyes met hers with a trusting look.

With a happy sigh, she laid her hand caressingly upon his. A shadow crossed his face as his glance fell upon the wedding-ring encircling her slender finger. It was but a momentary pang. Had she seen it, he asked himself on his homeward way, as he lived the happy hour he had passed with her over and over again. At her earnest entreaty, he had reluctantly left her, to return again in the evening. And she was alone, once more, with her new happiness; alone, but never to feel lonely again.

Face to face with a future dawning afresh from out the dim yet unforgotten past. The past! As the words rose to her lips she shivered; the look of aversion he had cast upon her wedding-ring, the symbol of another's love, pleaded for this last sacrifice. Had she not given away her heart, had she not promised her hand? Slowly she drew off the golden token of love placed there by the hand of a loving husband now dead, and taking a key from a chain she always wore, she opened an ebony and ivory inlaid cabinet, and pressing a spring, disclosed a deep drawer behind a recess. Kissing the little ring sadly and pitifully, she dropped it in.

It fell upon a sealed letter. She started nervously as the ghost of

the past confronted her. No need to read again the well remembered superscription: "To my dear wife, on the day she accepts another's love, or on her thirtieth birthday."

Her hand shakes, the blood flames across her face and fades away, leaving her, if possible, whiter than before. Reverently, she breaks the seal.

A message of a mighty love has followed her from beyond the grave. Through a haze of blinding tears, she reads his wish for her happiness, begging her to accept the sum of £40,000 he bequeaths to her, as a token of his love. For further particulars he refers her to his solicitors.

Unselfish Hugo! His love had watched over her in her loneliness and ignorance of the world; and in depriving her of the golden bait of a fortune, he had tested the disinterestedness of her lover.

Was it surprising that pride in that lover, who had borne the test nobly, should mingle in the tribute of gratitude she paid to her husband's memory?

When she again met her accepted lover, her eyes were dim with hushed tears, as in silence she put Hugo's letter into his hands.

Paul started, and deeply moved, exclaimed: "How generous!" Then seeing the tears in her eyes, he kissed them away, adding: "I will be as good to you as he was, my darling; better, I could not be."

A FLOWER SONG.

All along the crowded street,
Where the people jostle,
Hear her call her nosegays sweet,
Clearer than the throstle.
"Brisk and gay, at break o' day,
Earlier risen than any,
From the hills and far away—
Country flowers, a penny!"

She has cheeks and lips of red,
Bonny country roses;
While town ladies lay abed
She was picking posies.
Loud and clear, all the year,
Sign of hope to many,
See, she brings the country near—
"Buy my flowers, a penny!"

"Here are violets for your breast,
Winter time is over!
Daffodils with golden crest,
Pansies for the lover!
As for me, of low degree,
Blyther I than any;
Give me cowslips o' the lea—
Country flowers, a penny!"

All along the crowded ways
Of the grimy city,
Comes a whiff of country days,
Comes a rush of pity!
Though the town grind us down,
Here's delight for many;
God be thanked for summer's crown,
"Buy my flowers, a penny!"

G. B. Stuart.

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

ONE of the most popular and pleasant excursions round about Stockholm takes you to Mariefred and the ancient castle of Gripsholm: the former so called after a fifteenth century monastery dedicated to the Virgin. Grip is Swedish for vulture, and the very sound of Gripsholm suggests a wild, wooded place, given up to dark, solitary forests, haunted by birds of prey, and rock-bound shores washed by troubled waters. Such it may have been in ages past, but such it is no longer.

These waters were not troubled the day we paid them our visit, though winds blew cold and discoursed eloquently of the North Pole. Great coats were a painful necessity, in spite of sunshine. We had the upper deck to ourselves, and braved the chilling blast under the lee of the captain's cabin and the steering box. On the main deck and in the saloon's yet deeper depth, people of all nations sat and shivered, and shouted at each other in the shrill tones so dear to foreigners. All seemed to possess one link in common—a red Baedeker. Swedes, French, German, Spanish, and one or two English—all had a Baedeker. Like the sign of the Red Cross to the ancient crusader, so is Baedeker to modern tourists. And are they not also crusaders in their way; waging war upon all countries; not in the cause of religion, or freedom, or art; not always for love of nature; but too often following each other like a flock of sheep for the sake of excitement and imitation?

We, too, should have had a Baedeker no doubt, but there had not been one left on English or foreign soil. The tourist army of locusts had gone before and devoured them all. "Another edition in two months," was the invariable reply, in tones which seemed to say that for the sake of Baedeker it was well worth delaying one's journey. To-day there was quite a small edition on board, and the red covers were lying about the decks bright as poppies in a cornfield. Great coats and furs were at a premium, for the Swedes wrap up long before an Englishman dreams of doing so. The variable temperature perhaps gives them a sufficient reason; and the Frenchman's satirical definition that the climate is eight months winter and four months cold weather has some truth in it also. No matter how hot and calm it might be in Stockholm, the moment we found ourselves on Lake Malaren a cold and cruel wind sprang up to mar its beauties. It seemed to blow from all quarters, swirl round all the islands, rush up all the arms and inlets, sough and sigh amongst the forest trees, hover about our little steamer with shrieks and moanings, like

> "The wail of lost souls that in vain
> Seek rest from their pain."

And yet every succeeding visit appeared to disclose fresh beauties, unfold new points of interest. Long shore lines and undulations, sweeping round in curves, stretching out in wooded tongues. Occasional mansions, surrounded by park-like lawns and backed by an endless extent of forest. On a height, wooded, wild and tangled, an old, deep red, picturesque windmill was sharply outlined by the background of the blue, clear summer sky, with sails that were never meant to turn, and walls that never vibrated to the sound of the grindstone. Built only for effect, it was a somewhat childish idea, yet condoned by the additional tone and interest it threw over these romantic shores. On every side the aspect of the lake

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is diversified with a multitude of islands. There are channels so numerous and intricate that to steer one's course amongst them would seem the lesson of a lifetime. Forests abound. More than half Sweden is forest-land. Wild, beautiful forests, where you may revel in endless solitudes, in the song of the birds, the murmur of running streams, the fine fresh air of heaven, far from the haunts of men, the roar of cities. Down that channel to the left, the banks on either side lined with whispering and waving woods, you presently come to Sodertelje and all the picturesque life of the little town. Old women besiege you with cakes and cherries, make a small fortune and get excited with prosperity whilst the boat is being piloted through the locks. Just beyond this you gain your first experience of the Gotha canal.

But bear to the right, as we did to-day, and you will soon come to a broad, beautiful bay, crowned by the small town of Mariefred, a church and quiet graveyard overshadowing the landing-stage. On the opposite shore rises the imposing castle of Gripsholm, with its four unequal brick towers and their vane-pointed domes.

In this sheltered bay it is warm and pleasant. The icy wind gains no entrance here ; one feels in paradise. Great coats and furs are discarded and given over to the care of the fat, good-looking, good-natured stewardess. The captain speaks excellent English, is agreeable and attentive, as if to do his best for you were not only his duty but his delight.

"Often as I have been to Mariefred," said he, "I have never yet seen Gripsholm. But the day is so fine and we have so much time before us that I shall pay it my first visit." We upheld him in this laudable determination. "Dinner on board after we start again," he added. "There is an inn at Mariefred, but I don't think you would like it." We assured him that dinner on board and on deck had charms above and beyond the close confinement of the most illustrious restaurant, or of the Grand Hotel itself.

Everyone filed off in detachments, each to his own, to rally under the castle roof. The most conspicuous member of the cavalcade was, of course, an English spinster of uncertain age and severe aspect, who, in blue spectacles, a mushroom hat and a crinoline, looked as if her mission was to uphold the traditions of a past generation.

The walk led through the hilly churchyard and the small town, quiet and unpretending as an abandoned village. Rows of straight, deserted streets, looking very much like a huge toy set out for a child's amusement, rather than a habitation for the sons of men. Houses built of wood, painted many colours, white and yellow especially : none of them more than two stories high, many of one floor only, like lengthened bungalows. Windows, clean-curtained and carefully kept, were adorned with flourishing plants, evidently esteemed. The place was absolutely deserted ; life seemed stagnant.

Grass grew in the streets. Where were all the inhabitants, and what doing? How did they pass their existence, earn their daily bread?

We were a hundred yards or so behind the pilgrims, who, straggling on in front, awoke echoes in the quiet thoroughfares but no manner of responsive excitement. No face came to any window; no bright eyes or maiden's curious gaze added to the beauty of blooms and flowers. Windows remained undisturbed, curtains undrawn.

"Ah! parais à ta fenêtre,
Qu'un doux regard de tes beaux yeux
En mon âme pénêtre,
Et m'entr'ouvre les cieux!"

In vain we offered up silent serenades. Mesmeric influence, that loadstone of sentiment, had apparently no place in the short and simple annals of the people of Mariefred. None rushed to their doors to gaze after the retreating army. The inhabitants seemed a race apart, a law unto themselves. Perhaps they turned day into night, and were plunged in dreamland. The monastery of St. Mary itself, in its most cloistered days, could not have appeared more dead to the world.

Out of the village into an avenue of trees, through which one caught glimpses of domes and turrets: a short, shaded walk. Near the castle the trees spread out into small woods and shrubberies. Gardens flourished without the walls, flower beds with large pansies delicate as a butterfly's wing, well-kept paths, seats cunningly secluded. A few feet from the castle stretched the lovely waters of the lake. You might stand upon the small landing pier and let the ripples flash about you. Across there, a very short distance compared with the round we had made, the village slept in peace, the church steeple pointed to the blue ethereal sky, the hands of the church clock slowly told the passing moments.

An arched gateway admitted us into a courtyard, quaint, irregular, brick-built, gray and sombre, yet formidable looking as became an ancient castle which has taken part in the history of Sweden, has sheltered kings, entertained them, imprisoned them. It began its career in the far-off ages, but seems to have first become of importance about the fourteenth century, when Bo Jonsson Grip, in the days of King Albert of Sweden, gave it the name it has since retained. Then it was rebuilt by Gustavus Vasa, who made of it a more picturesque and perfect building than it is to-day, with slanting roofs that harmonised with the towers.

At the same time, Gustavus Vasa, active and energetic, fighting with the world, and playing his full part in the battle of life, was no friend to cloistered monks. He rebuilt and fortified the castle, but he demolished the monastery. It may be that he gave the monks the option of transferring themselves to the castle, changing an inward and spiritual warfare for the more outward and visible sign of the temporal.

But if they accepted the offer, doffed the monk's cowl for the soldier's helmet, laid aside pruning hooks for spears, history is silent upon the subject. History is not always silent or discreet; does not always bear out the maxim the monks themselves would perhaps have been the first to charge upon her: De mortuis nil nisi bonum.

In this castle, Eric XIV., son of the great Gustavus Vasa, kept his brother John a prisoner in a small turret room, a narrow passage encircling it the only change allowed him for air and exercise. Here he might walk round and round in endless monotony, returning always to the same point, now and then looking out upon the world and sighing for freedom. His time came. He escaped, and eventually deposed his brother, who in his turn became a prisoner, went insane, and was put to death by John, with a revenge that was evidently deep and lasting. At Gripsholm, too, in 1809, Gustavus IV. signed his abdication.

Thus Gripsholm has had vicissitudes, seen changes within and without her walls. For the present she has sunk into a state of well-earned repose. Her life is calm and uneventful; her peace disturbed only by such inroads as we have under contemplation.

The irregular courtyard, with its round massive tower and brick walls, was imposing, almost mediæval. Two cannon were before it with mouths pointed, as if asking, like sentinels, whether you were friend or foe. One is called the *boar*, the other the *sow*, names too unromantic and undignified for such an atmosphere. On the walls were crests and coat of arms, so that the courtyard looked heraldic as well as military. It was the most imposing bit in all the building.

Within, it might be called historical. Many of the rooms were extremely interesting; fitted up—some of them scantily enough—with mediæval furniture and tapestry, ancient objects of glass and silver, antique cabinets, carved and jewelled, and ivory images that might have adorned some pagan shrine. But if some of the rooms were barely furnished, the walls amply made up for any deficiency. They were lined with historical portraits to the number of some 2,000, many of them of the greatest interest. Some had been painted, and well painted, by the unhappy Eric XIV. There were sovereigns and personages of all nations. Eric himself, and his father, Gustavus Vasa; Catherine de Medici, with an expression worthy of her character; Mary of Scotland, lovely and bewitching; Henry VIII., in great breadth and boldness.

The captain of the steamer was standing beside us, greatly admiring the substantial proportions of this portly monarch. But when we informed him, by a slip of the tongue, that he had had eight wives, his admiration knew no bounds. Then, feeling it a positive duty to the shade of the bluff old king and to history, to withdraw the surplus consorts, it was plainly visible that King Harry went down at least twenty-five per cent in the good skipper's estimation.

Some of the rooms were gloomy for want of light, often admitted

through small latticed windows and tinted glass. Low ceilings, with great beams running across them, had some of these rooms; immense fireplaces where you might roast an ox or conceal a company of soldiers. But everything was interesting, the portraits alone were worthy, not one visit, but many.

A staircase, not very beautiful, but very ancient, with shallow steps of dark oak and quaint old balustrades, led upwards to the room so long a melancholy prison, and round which still seems to hang a profound melancholy, as if the ghost of the insane and murdered Eric haunted its old quarters and charged the atmosphere. Yet he was not put to death here. Two inquisitive German fraus—with high cheek-bones, loud voices, and determined wills: these things generally go together—began searching the fireplace in the angle of the room, raking amongst the ashes, the dust and fragments of mortar dislodged by time and weather—for all the world like a couple of that extinct race, the old Paris chiffoniers. Whether searching for hidden autographs, or the Philosopher's Stone, or a skull and cross-bones to carry off by way of lively remembrance; or whether the insane spirit of the luckless Eric had seized upon them; no one knew. They were very excited and had to be removed by strong words of persuasion.

From grave to gay.—Within a few feet was the theatre built by the father of the unpopular Gustavus IV., in whose plays the king himself often took part. It was dark and sombre. Empty benches seemed peopled with phantoms of a courtly mob; boards echoed to the footsteps of a dead and gone monarch, frivolous and foolish, on whom the cares of an empire sat far too lightly. It was the saddest room in the castle; more sad than the gloomy prison itself. We were glad to leave it and presently find ourselves in the open air and the healthier influences without the castle walls.

The pilgrims had scattered. Every one had gone his own way. We had the walks, and the flowers, and the old grey walls of the irregular pentagonal building, with its unequal towers, to ourselves. It was a very lovely and romantic spot. The castle stood on a neck of land, almost surrounded by water. It rose above the trees in dignity and solitude, somewhat marred by a few modern buildings and dependencies added to it from time to time. Land stretched out in every direction, points opposing each other on the lake, wider waters beyond, with small islands that here and there rose like emeralds in a silver setting.

The hour for reassembling was still distant. We sat upon the landing stage and took our fill of all this beauty; enjoyed the close view of the romantic castle while its influence was yet upon us, and its portraits seem to gaze with a thousand eyes full of the Eastern warning: This also shall pass away. On the opposite shore was the steamer, quietly waiting the hour to strike from the church tower that overshadowed it. When that hour approached we wended our way

back to the little town, full of strange thoughts of what we had seen, pictures of past lives and histories taking fantastic form and colour-

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ing in one's brain. The town was not one whit less deserted. That people here lived and moved and had their being one supposed; for over one doorway was an announcement that printing was done on the premises; over another that dresses were fashionably made; beyond, that books were bound; yet further, that books were sold. But nowhere was any creature visible. And when we came to the bookseller's announcement, E. suggested that a small historical account of Gripsholm, if any existed, would not be a bad investment.

But the door was closed. There were flowers in the windows guarded by spotless muslin, but no sign anywhere of books or people. We ventured to knock at the door, as people knock who are afraid of waking the dead. A far off voice bade us "open and walk up." We entered upon a narrow passage and still narrower staircase: narrow even for sons of men after Pharaoh's lean kine. It certainly was a primitive, unworldly way of doing business. In an upper room appeared an old woman, a quaint cap upon her head, neither asleep nor inactive, nor looking in any way separate from mankind. Books on tables, chairs and shelves, surrounded her, without which the room would have been like any ordinary sitting-room. She greeted us with old fashioned courtesy, with pleasant voice and gentle look; placed us chairs, as if we had merely done her the honour of paying her a morning visit, and she might be about to offer us the ancient hospitality of cake and wine.

But to her there was system and order in all this chaos and confusion of books. She at once produced what was asked for, and was even not quite so unsophisticated as she seemed, for of two histories brought forward, she recommended the more expensive and more profitable. When it had been bought and paid for, one felt that this had been no mere sale and barter transaction, but an interchange of civilities, an exchange of favours.

We left her and made way towards the steamer, whose whistle had sounded and whose first bell was ringing a wild peal. And—wonder of wonders—a well appointed carriage and pair, with a coachman whose uniform as usual was all pipestems and tassels, came tearing down towards the boat with a passenger and a portmanteau: the one sign of animation we had seen in the streets of Mariefred. This had mysteriously appeared out of the country from unknown shades and groves, to which it returned.

The hour struck and we departed. Awnings had been spread on deck and round the sides, and a feast, with no Barmecide element about it, was prepared. The captain was very animated about what he had seen, and again asked if we could positively assure him it was six wives and not eight the fine old king had taken to the splendour of his throne and the capacity of his heart. This seemed to him the only source of regret in that fair morning's experience and pilgrimage.

The feast ended, we launched into the lake's wide waters. Back came the cold and cutting wind; great coats and furs were claimed by respective owners. Again we braved the elements from the freezing heights of the upper deck. Not that upper and lower decks made any great difference in degrees of temperature; the wind searched and found out all alike; and as E. alliteratively said, in words worthy of a Laureate:

> "Beaux, belles, and Baedekers, baffled by briny breezes,
> Sat shivering o'er Swedish streams, suppressing sneezes."

But the wind gained the day, and presently the decks were deserted

for the cabin, which must have been terribly stuffy, cribbed confined, by the time the towers of Stockholm opened up and we came to an anchor.

One fine morning we started for Upsala, chief university town of Sweden. There are two ways of reaching it from Stockholm; by train or by canal; but the latter journey is pleasanter and more characteristic. Like the passage up the Gotha canal, this other canal route is unique of its kind and distinctly peculiar to Sweden.

It gives one the delightful sensation of a new experience; a sensation that grows rare and yet more rare with time and travel. You distinctly feel when going up the Upsala canal that you are in a new world; are doing something you never did before, and will probably not find in any other country.

Everyone talks of the Gotha canal, everyone does it; few ever think of the Upsala canal or dream of doing it. Most people chose train in preference to boat. It is more quickly over, and the sooner they get to Upsala the better. Yet the journey was almost more enjoyable than the journey up the Gotha canal. It was very different, less important; there were no interesting locks to mount or descend; there was no golden-haired lady on board to dazzle us with her charms and divide our attention with passing scenes; there were no midnight experiences on dark mysterious lakes, no walks under the stars through avenues of splendid beeches. But there was the pleasure of the unexpected.

We had heard nothing of this canal journey; its praises had not been sung as those of the Gotha. Anticipating little, we received much. There was no ceremony, no preparation; no troublesome hours for meals long drawn out. Best of all there were no tourists. With the exception of a few pleasant Swedes, we had it to ourselves. There were more second-class passengers, but they were forward on a lower deck and were rather an advantage than otherwise. One could see them, and study human nature from an edifying elevation. They were quiet and in no way interfered with anyone. The boat calls at many stations, and they were bound to one or other on business. Conspicuous and out of place amongst them was a lady, coquettishly dressed, with tight-fitting kid gloves and a lace parasol. She asked questions the whole time, took down answers, looked about her, consulted Baedeker, and was evidently writing a guide book on her own account. It ought to have been intelligent by reason of her expression and manner; exhaustive from the amount of pains she took to gather information. She was travelling under the protection of an attentive husband, who seemed very proud of her; sharpened her pencils, referred to her book, held her parasol, generally fetched and carried for her, like any gallant of high degree. He was evidently very much her inferior, but badly as nature had matched them, they were a devoted pair.

We had left Stockholm in the early morning. The day fortunately was bright and warm, for the journey in bad weather would have turned all our best to worst, all our sweet to bitter. We were to halt at Skokloster: an old castle passed on the way, full of wonders

STOCKHOLM.

and curiosities, full of histories, and—in the dead of night—possibly full of ghosts. At high noon, no ghosts were visible. At Skokloster we should leave the boat to go on her way to Upsala, ourselves taking a small steamer some hours later on, which happened to run that day. This little steamer proved nothing more than a launch, and in rough or cold weather must be sufficient penance to expiate many sins.

We started from the Riddarholm, where almost everything does start in Stockholm, except the small local steamers. For a short time we ploughed the waters of the Malar Lake, through scenes now

grown familiar, but never wearisome. Soon we turned sharply to the right, into narrower and unknown waters and scenery of a new description. The wooded luxuriance of the lake gave place to long stretches of marshy ground. Again fields, evidently cultivated at great pains, were backed by wooded hills and enlivened by occasional farm-houses. Waters were often shallow and narrow, and we plunged into great reeds and rushes with a delightful swish that is nothing less than one of nature's many pastoral symphonies, bracing up heart and soul with a feeling of purest ecstasy. Why have the simplest things often so great a power to charm? The bulrushes were, some of them, ten and twelve feet high, and at one station we shipped a dried bundle of them, so tall as to excite universal curiosity and admiration.

Outside one narrow channel, which had sharp turns and twisted like a writhing snake, we had to wait while a dozen barges passed us in procession, towed by a small toy tug. They were attached to each other "in linked harmony," one man to each barge, and the procession seemed as long as a Lord Mayor's show, and far more interesting. Far more beautiful, too, the surroundings. We waited in the midst of the rushes, beside a wide stretch of fields where labourers, men and women, reaping and gathering, stopped their work to look at us, sharpened their scythes, and rested in the sunshine. To the left, divided only by the narrow water from the flat fields, was the loveliest, wildest, most flower-gemmed copse imaginable, with lights and shadows, gleams and glimpses of sunshine, rustling and murmuring trees full of Nature's tones and harmonies. Past this copse, gliding through the water, one after the other at measured distances, came the red barges, completing a singular and very enchanting picture.

We took our turn when the passage was clear, and copse and fields passed out of sight, and the reapers reaping broke out into a wild Swedish chorus which came after us as a parting serenade—rang out joyously upon the air, and seemed to keep rhythm to their scythes.

The boat called at many places, passed into many waters. At every station there was an exchange of passengers, chiefly of the second class. Many were peasants dressed in their best: such ordinary costumes as might be seen in any part of England. The difference was in people and tongue.

Once, passing from a narrow channel into wider waters, where the shores were broken and diversified, and small creeks, with which we had nothing to do, ran up into the land far away out of sight, we came to the very prettiest and most delightful spot yet seen in Sweden. A small town sleeping in full sunshine on the sloping shores of the lake. Houses of many colours rose one behind another, separated by the narrow creek from richly wooded heights and undulations.

On the small landing stage a group awaited our arrival, one solitary passenger was taken on board, and a small cloud of handkerchiefs waved him farewell.

We longed to leave the steamer and explore this lovely spot: but to yield to such temptations in travelling would be to end all plans and all time. Those to whom days and months and all places are alike, may make use of unexpected discoveries, break the thread of their arrangements and take it up again at pleasure. This forms the true delight of travelling; removes all that is stereotyped and conventional; often yields adventures which break the monotony of days that might otherwise succeed and resemble each other only too closely; leads to scenes unheard of, unrecorded, but not the less beautiful for that reason. It is the fatality of life, the contradiction of human nature, that as a rule those to whom such things are possible are wanting in the spirit of enterprise, whilst to those who would make use of every opportunity time and circumstance are denied.

This little place was Sigtuna, the ancient pagan capital of Sweden, which had to give place to Upsala and Stockholm. Founded in the early ages, once large and prosperous, it is now little more than a village, with about five hundred inhabitants, and a few antiquarian ruins to tell of the past. Dead and gone and forgotten is all its ancient prosperity, and happily no one is left to mourn the change. Centuries have rolled away since it fell from its high estate; generations have succeeded to a new order of things, than which they knew no other. A small rural district is all that it now can write itself, but neither time nor chance, nor man nor decree, has been able to take from its beauty. Never could it have been more lovely than now, overlooking those sparkling waters that beat against its rocks, surrounded by endless forests: a background of wooded undulations, rich and dark, and fringed against the far-off, clear blue sky.

After this, long, straight and more monotonous grew the shores, and in about half an hour the imposing towers of Skokloster, where the water was widest, rose above the surrounding trees and announced the break in our journey.

The stations between this and Stockholm had been too insignificant to own a pier. The steamer in sight, a small boat had shot out from the shore, a rope was thrown to it, a ladder put over the side, and passengers scrambled in or out, often just escaping a cold plunge into the lake. But at Skokloster a landing-stage enabled those who left to walk on shore. It was about half-past twelve: we had been three hours and a half on board. The journey had been singular, and missing it we should have missed one of our pleasantest days in Sweden.

The word Skokloster means "Forest Convent," and in the old monastic days no doubt the place merited its name. It now belongs to Count Brahe, a descendant of Tycho Brahe, the astronomer. Gustavus Vasa put an end to the Cistercian convent as he did to the monastery of Mariefred; the building in time partially or wholly disappeared, and the present one rose in its stead. It is full of treasures

and curiosities, many of them collected during the Thirty Years' War. The custodian met us at the pier, and it was amusing to find him far too consequential to carry our hand-bag, though quite ready to accept a fee later on for showing us over the château—certainly well earned by his civility during the inspection.

The way from the pier led uphill, under the grateful shade of trees; for, coming off the water, air and sun suddenly seemed seven times heated. A hundred yards or so of gradual ascent and we stood before the massive, imposing building, quadrangular in form, with four octogan towers surmounted by black cupolas and small turrets. Four long straight rows of stiff windows, one above another, stared at us like countless eyes in the white walls, gloomy and sombre. A cracked bell chimed the hours with a melancholy tongue of iron, that seemed to say to the listener, in the words of the monks of La Trappe, and in the midst of a profound solitude and silence: "Memento Mori."

The inspection commenced with the courtyard, large, silent and depressing, in which surely the sun never penetrated. We were alone, not one of a crowd, as at Gripsholm. And here there was no portrait of a fine old English king to dazzle a worthy skipper with admiration, and, as it seemed, spur him on to go and do likewise. But perhaps we wronged him.

Large, white-washed corridors ran round the quadrangle, and proverbs of wit and wisdom, all of a thoughtful and elevating tendency, were written upon the walls in many languages and singular fashion. The rooms, large and well-proportioned, contained many rare curiosities. Collections of jewels and plate, objects of priceless and historical value, cabinets wonderfully inlaid, antique furniture, ancient chimney pieces large and splendidly carved, pictures and portraits; and, not least of all, a collection of some of the most wonderful and beautiful tapestry in existence. Some of the ceilings, that of the principal drawing-room especially, were splendidly painted. Above, was a magnificent library of over twenty thousand volumes, many of them in white vellum bindings, dry, ancient, and apparently unused. It was a feast of reason and a flow of soul only to walk from case to case, classified and progressive, and read the titles where titles were. Equally splendid was the adjoining armoury, but suggestive of very different times and scenes: the knight of the sword contrasted with the knight of the pen; the two reposing side by side here in such harmony as surely never existed between them in life. The object of chief interest in the armoury was a wonderfully wrought shield by Benvenuto Cellini which belonged to the Emperor Charles V., and was taken at Prague. The custodian declared that £20,000 had been lately offered for it, and refused.

In one of the turrets we came upon an unexpected prisoner. The room contained old relics, swords and guns, and clothes worn by a great man in battle. A little bird, with possibly a taste for antiquities,

had flown down the chimney, and was caught in its own trap. There it might have remained and in turn become an antiquity also, but for our visit. Windows were opened, and it soon found its way out, and was soaring over land and lake. We, too, longed for wings to do likewise. Who has not felt the longing, especially when listening to Shelley's lark, that for very happiness "soaring still doth sing?"

Our visit over, luncheon had to be thought of. One cannot live upon tapestry and beautiful objects. They are very interesting, but their inspection is terribly exhausting. We cannot live upon them—it is not so sure that one cannot die of them. There is no inn at Skokloster, and some of the dependents of the castle undertake to provide luncheon for visitors. The attendant led the way to some neat but humble rooms, and here they promised that in half an hour exhausted nature should be provided with food. There was a delicious vagueness as to the kind and measure of the supplies. We had visions of nectar and ambrosia.

To pass away the time, the custodian accompanied us to the church, which belonged to the original monastery and is interesting. Then he finally bowed himself out of our presence, and left us to wander at will about gardens and avenues. The clock with its melancholy voice struck two, and we hastened to obey the signal. The windows of the little room were open to the pure, warm air and rustling trees and bright blue sky: windows with deep old-fashioned casements, in which we sat and lounged with a feeling of intense, pleasurable restfulness after our late antiquarian feast; whilst a savoury smell, wafted up through an open doorway, announced a feast in which we devoutly hoped antiquity would have no part. A little maid waited upon us, and from regions unseen brought excellent supplies, if not precisely Olympian food; whilst all was served on the whitest of plain damask.

Altogether that visit to Skokloster was wonderfully pleasant; left behind it a feeling of temporary seclusion from the world; of wandering in unfrequented paths; of a château large and imposing if not strictly beautiful, and containing objects of rare interest. The little steamer was due at three o'clock, and when the hour sounded from the cracked and melancholy bell, we went down to the small landing-stage. Lake and opposite and surrounding shores were in full sunshine, but no boat was visible.

About half past three a black speck came into sight. Could this be the craft that was to have the honour of conveying us to Upsala? A thin line of smoke, rising upwards, and slightly troubling the clear sky, seemed to answer the question. It puffed on to a distant point on our side, and was lost in the shadow of the trees. On the opposite shore a red flag was suddenly hoisted, signal of distress or need. In a few minutes the boat darted across; and with the help of glasses one made out a small landing-stage, and a group of people in every attitude of expectation.

After that it made direct for our pier. A small boat, no bigger than a steam launch, not very clean, very little protected against wind and storm, altogether uncomfortable. We started, and in the warm, fine weather, enjoyed the novel experience.

The boat, calling at innumerable stations, made slow progress. Wherever she was wanted, up went a red flag, and away she darted, performing incessant zigzags, until we began to think that Upsala would never be reached that day. One distant station thought it unnecessary to run up the signal, and she passed on. Half-a-dozen passengers in waiting began frantic appeals, up went the tardy flag, back we had to put. Where did they all come from, these people? Where did these little landing stages lead to? What sort of settlements? What kind of people? What out-of-the-world lives did they live? For we never saw any houses: nothing but long unbroken stretches of wood and forest: apparently an uninhabited country, lonely and desolate. Nothing but these small landing stages here and there, to show that somewhere beyond those forests dwelt people who occasionally had need to communicate with the outer world.

The boat took an immense amount of luggage on board; cases empty and full; crates of beer bottles, proving that up here, at any rate, total abstinence and the blue ribbon found little favour. At one station there seemed to have been a general flitting. Three old ladies, a servant, beds, and sundry articles of household furniture. The old ladies had last instructions to deliver to those they left behind; extra cloaks had to be taken off or put on; long and tender embracings and partings: all in the most deliberate manner, whilst the boat waited in patience. At last the captain said he would go without them, and they made the final plunge on board rather than be separated from their beloved goods and chattels.

By degrees the little craft became crowded with people, choked with cargo. She grew low in the water, and one began to have visions of foundering, and a great splash, and a tragedy. There even came a time when the captain refused any more cargo: decks were full, and also the wooden roof or awning. By this time we were in the Upsala canal; narrow, rush-grown waters on a level with the banks: shores no longer wooded, but cleared, sometimes cultivated. Signs and sounds of life gradually awakened. Small houses, frequent landing stages, where flags were no longer needed. A peculiar tone about the landscape reminded one of the green meadows of Holland with their broad dykes and canals: for this canal was sometimes hardly broader than a dyke. It was extremely interesting, everything was so new and unfamiliar. But when three hours had passed away we were not sorry to approach Upsala. Moving on board was out of the question, breathing only just possible.

Finally, the banks rose on either side; streets; a long row of houses lining the canal. We were in Upsala; passing upwards to the landing stage. Warehouses, blacksmiths' shops, iron factories

dark and grimy gave place to quieter houses, clean and white. A weir in front of us, evidently not to be passed, and just on this side of it our landing stage.

The very first person on shore to greet our eyes was the second-class lady passenger who had been on board the first steamer, attended by her devoted husband. Her note book was conspicuous, but the lace parasol was nowhere. She still looked the essence of neatness; a comely woman who knew how to set herself off to the best advantage. She gave us an involuntary flash of recognition as we landed; then turned to her inferior half with a look of consternation, as if for once she had not seized her opportunity. "My beloved Theophilus," we heard her murmur, "this also we might have done—ought to have done!"

We heard no more, but went our way; a long line of houses to the right, trees and water to the left; a very picturesque scene. We enquired our way to the *Stadshotellet:* and looked about us to see how far the venerable and learned atmosphere of the university town had overshadowed place and people.

LOST LOVE.

MANY and many a day she sat
On the swelling sands by the sea;
Many and many a day she sighed:
"Come back, oh, my love, to me!"
And over the sea, to the far-off south,
And out to the west looked she;
And many and many a ship went by,
But never again came he.

"Oh, fair and sweet were the words he spoke
When he saw me first that day;
Oh, he was the best and bravest man,
And I could not say him nay.
The fairest lover, the strongest man,
And shun me all who may,
He loved me well, and he loves me still,
Far and far away."

But the warm days fled, and the leaves fell dead,
And the winds swept over the sea;
"Oh, wild, wild waves," in her grief she said,
"Hide him for ever from me!"
And the wild waves rose, and the wild, wild wind
Blew out from the caves of the sea;
A ship went down, and a man was lost—
Bitterly then wept she.

A grave scooped out on the yellow sands,
And a grave down under the sea—
Two plighted spirits wander apart
Till the end of the world shall be.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

UNDER the bare old trees, a grey light changing every resemblance of the past soft summer days, the two girls met unexpectedly. There was a bit of the wild common at Dunsfield, edged by a row of fine elms, which in summer listened to the love tales of youths and maidens ; but in winter few troubled their solitude. Two miles from any habitation, it was strange that this should be the selected walk of Norah Fitzgerald and her friend Lottie Maynes, neither of them lovers of black solitude, and neither expecting to meet the other.

There was embarrassment in the greeting. Norah's beautiful Irish face blushed as she recognised the quick, expressive countenance of her former school friend.

"Norah ! I did not know you were in the neighbourhood ! "

"I am staying at the Browns'," responded the other.

"The Browns' ! " repeated Lottie, drily. "Ah ! I remember ; one of the girls was at our school. Very heavy, very rich ; soap, isn't it ? "

Lottie was little, lightly made, and with a face so full of intelligence you forgave its lack of beauty. She looked defiantly up into the good blue eyes of the lovely girl beside her, and something she saw there made the defiant look drop away. She said, uneasily :

"I beg your pardon, Norah. Are the reports we have heard true ? "

"Quite true," said Norah, gravely.

"It—it seemed so impossible ! Forgive me ! I thought what we used to talk of at school would come to pass : and this instead of it ! It is past believing."

"You know nothing about it," said Norah, quickly. "It is better not to pursue the subject." And she would have passed on, but Lottie caught her hand.

"Norah, we have been fast friends for years ; do not let us part like this. I could not bear to think you fickle and mercenary."

"But you *do* think it," said Norah, proudly, a warm light shining in her face. "You believe me all that is worst."

"No, no, indeed I don't ! But when I knew you wished to marry your cousin in Limerick ——"

"Hush ! " cried the Irish girl, hastily. "I can't bear that *yet*."

And the impulsive hands were clasped together, as the girl looked sternly and drearily out over the gloomy common. There was silence for a minute, then Lottie said timidly :

"Will you come and see me, Norah, and talk it over ? "

"It is a settled thing, Lottie, and needs no talking over. A good and worthy man is to be my husband—soon, very soon"—her voice trembled. "I'll see you *when I'm married.*"

Just then there came jauntily along the path the figure of a middle-aged Irish gentleman. He wore a shooting suit, and an air of general self-satisfaction. When he beheld the two girls, a wary looked passed over his face. Norah turned as he approached, murmuring :

"My father."

A genial smile beamed and a rich brogue answered :

"A friend, me darlin', in these lonely parts ! Introjuce me, I beg."

And forthwith Captain Fitzgerald was made known to Miss Maynes. Instinctively Lottie disliked the man, and she knew Norah had no mother.

"Do ye live near here ?" enquired the Captain, insinuatingly.

"Two miles off," said Lottie, quietly. "I want Norah to come and see me."

"Indeed ! and what a pleasure for her ! But we are off to London almost immediately. After a certain event, though, my daughter will be here altogether," he pursued, smilingly ; "and sure ye'll be capital neighbours."

Lottie Maynes bowed, but in some way felt it hard to speak. Captain Fitzgerald jauntily glanced at his watch.

"Time to go back, Norah. Sure there are more charming ladies invited to tea than any poor mortal man has the right to expect to see. Are you going to add to the group, Miss Maynes ?"

A slight raising of the head Lottie could not control, as she answered :

"I am returning to Holmwood at once." Then her eyes rested lingeringly on Norah as they took leave.

"No time to come and see me, Norah ?"

"Not yet," answered the girl, quickly. "We shall meet by-and-bye."

"Of coorse, of coorse !" genially responded the father, raising his hat, as his daughter slowly turned away with him.

What a wearied, plotting little brain was Lottie's as she walked fast home to her mother, whose bright, clever face looked across the cups and saucers, which were revealed by the firegleams to be rare and costly.

"At last, child ! The tea will be almost a syrup, through waiting for your ladyship."

Quickly Lottie threw off hat and jacket, coming to her low chair with so eager a look Mrs. Maynes (she was the Honourable Mrs. Maynes, reader, having that prefix to her name as the daughter of a good old Tory lord, still living) said anxiously :

"What has happened, Lottie ?"

"Oh, mamma! Poor Norah Fitzgerald *is* going to marry young Brown the soap-boiler, and I've seen her! She is staying with his father and mother."

A smile half sarcastic, half pitying, passed over the mother's face.

"He is very rich, Lottie. Her friends will count her fortunate!"

"But," demurred Lottie, vehemently, as she set down her cup and saucer with a little ring, "you saw her at Brussels—that beautiful, high-bred girl! And—and mother, you have seen Brown."

"Yes," said Mrs. Maynes quietly, "I have seen Arthur Brown. He is a quiet, honourable man. Why should you regret the match?"

Lottie laid her hands on her knees in desperation.

"Don't you see she loves her cousin, Brian O'Moore?"

"No, my dear; I can't see what I don't know anything about. Probably, if it was a boy and girl affection, they will be better off as it is. Irish love matches are seldom prudent."

"Oh, but mamma, you don't know anything yet!"

"Enlighten me, then."

"Well, Norah's mother died two years ago, leaving eight children."

"Poor things!"

"Norah was sixteen then, and she is the eldest. Her mother gave her leave to marry Brian, and it was only when her father saw Mr. Brown would marry her, any doubt came of it. I saw Brian once, but not to speak to, and it breaks my heart to think of that Brown in his place!"

"Hush, child! Have you seen the father?"

"Yes, to-day. He did not want Norah to be with me, I saw."

Mrs. Maynes pondered for a few minutes, and ended with a sigh.

"There is nothing we can do, Lottie, unless the girl herself asks us."

Lottie jumped up, radiant.

"Dear little clever mother! You mean you *will* help her if she needs it?"

"Not so fast, child! We have to hear what she needs first. Dear me, snow is falling! Ring for the shutters to be closed, and the fire made up."

That evening the widowed mother and Lottie sat listening to the silence. This very Irish sounding state of matters was literally the case; for whereas an hour before a bleak wind blew gustily round the house, making shutters, windows and doors crack and creak with sudden bursts, now an unnatural stillness prevailed.

"Dear me, the wind was better than this!" exclaimed Lottie, rising from her chair impatiently. "I must just look out at the snow."

"My dear Lottie," said Mrs. Maynes, shivering and drawing a shawl round her shoulders, "don't undo the shutters; you cannot possibly see anything. I shall go to bed directly after prayers. Ring for the servants."

Lottie drew back from the window, and rang the bell. Presently

the three servants entered. Holmwood was grander in recollections than present prosperity, and the widowed mistress lacked the retinue of domestics which had done much to lessen the income of her somewhat extravagant husband. After prayers, Hannah, the elderly housekeeper and maid combined, waited to assist Mrs. Maynes in gathering up her work, key-basket, &c.

"It's been a wild night, ma'am, and the snow is falling that thick and heavy! It'll be bad travelling for any poor soul!"

"Perhaps it will be warmer for the snow to-morrow. Come Lottie, Hannah is ready to put out the lamp."

The two other servants had gone to bed, and Mrs. Maynes lingered a moment in the lobby to say good-night to her daughter

"Hark! what's that?" said Lottie, starting. A sound of the wire of the hall-door bell being pulled caught her quick ear. A second after, a quick peal rang out.

"What can it be?" whispered Mrs. Maynes, turning pale. Hannah looked down into the great dark hall by holding the flickering candle over the banisters.

"I'll go down and see," she said.

"Be careful, Hannah! don't undo a bolt until you know who it is."

"Never fear, ma'am. Just go into your room and don't catch cold."

"I'll come with you, Hannah," said Lottie.

"You'll just bide where you are, Miss Lottie," said the old woman in a determined voice, as she descended, candle in hand, the staircase over which Lottie eagerly leaned to listen.

"Who's there?" asked Hannah, in a commanding voice.

"A traveller who has lost his way," came the muffled answer.

"Dear me," nervously whispered Mrs. Maynes, "I hope she'll be careful!"

"We can't unbar to strangers this time of night," said Hannah.

"Sure I'm half dead with cold, and no christian can refuse shelter on a night like this!" said a voice with a strong brogue in it. Lottie descended a few stairs.

"Ask his name and where he was going, Hannah!" she whispered loudly.

"Will you say who you are, sir, and where you were going?" demanded the old servant.

"Brian O'Moore is my name, if I'm myself at all, and I was on my way to a place called Fleet-Hill to see a friend."

Hannah was totally unprepared for her next orders, received after a hurried whispering between mother and daughter.

"You may open the door, Hannah," said Mrs. Maynes, "and light the lamp in the drawing-room."

"Are you sure, ma'am?"

"Quite sure. We know of the gentleman."

Heavily the bolts grated back, the key turned, and a figure as white as a christmas cake slowly entered the dim hall. Hannah surveyed the visitor dubiously.

"I'm ashamed to bring all this snow in, but I've been for two hours wandering like a lost spirit over some bare bit of land."

"Never mind the snow, sir," said Hannah, mollified by the pleasant countenance revealed; "that common is a bad place of a dark night, and the shutters all shut here too!"

The old servant did not lead her guest to suppose that Holmwood was anything but brilliantly illuminated on winter nights! For economy's sake it was far otherwise. At last the embers of the drawing-room fire were cheered into a blaze, the lamp lit, and a pair of slippers found for the traveller. Then Mrs. Maynes descended, followed by her daughter.

The young Irishman bowed gratefully as the ladies entered.

"I am glad we are able to offer you a shelter this terrible night," said Mrs. Maynes, gently; "you had lost your way?"

"I had, madam—I am an entire stranger here, and took my directions for a five-mile walk at the station, without counting on a snow-storm. Am I far from Fleet Hill, can you tell me?"

"Mr. Brown's place?"

A dark frown gathered on the handsome face.

"Ay, Mr. Brown's place."

"It is three miles from here. You must have taken the wrong turning at the cross roads."

"Very like I did. Could I reach there to-night, think you?" asked the young man eagerly.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Maynes, decidedly. "You will stay here to-night and can go to Mr. Brown's after breakfast."

"I am truly obliged to you, madam; but," hesitating, "I may miss some one I've come from Ireland to see—I may be too late."

"This person is Miss Norah Fitzgerald?" quietly conjectured Mrs. Maynes.

"You know her?" cried the young man, in delighted amazement. "Ah, then, madam, you will help me to save her from misery!"

"I hope I may help you both," said Mrs. Maynes. "Norah was my daughter Lottie's favourite school-fellow. I am Mrs. Maynes."

"She has often spoken of you. May I tell you the treachery which has nearly separated us for ever?"

Inviting her guest to be seated, and despatching Lottie with directions for the preparation of a meal and a bed-room, Mrs. Maynes listened to the following:

"Norah and I have loved each other from childhood. Ours is but a distant cousinship; in fact no cousinship at all; but her mother treated me as a son, and gave her daughter to me on her death-bed. A year after, Captain Fitzgerald traded on the affection of his daughter, told her I was about to marry some one else, got her

engaged to this Mr. Brown, and I never should have heard a word till too late but for her little brother Terry, a boy of twelve. He walked nearly twenty miles to tell me what was happening—and what had been said of me; and I came off to England at once. Captain Fitzgerald is to have his base gambling debts paid the day my poor Norah is sacrificed! Oh, Mrs. Maynes, as you have a daughter of your own, whose happiness is dear to you, help me to regain my promised wife."

Tears were in Mrs. Maynes' eyes, and she held out both her hands.

"You may trust me—but you must leave all to me. Now make a hearty supper, and be thankful the snow-storm has driven you among friends."

Lottie pleaded in vain for any revelation of her mother's plans, and was almost as impatient as the Irish lover, when nothing transpired till two hours after breakfast. Mrs. Maynes had received a visitor privately, to whom she had sent a note early in the morning. She was closeted in the library for nearly an hour, and when she came to the dining-room where eager eyes were watching for her, she said:

"I have someone here who wishes to see you, Mr. O'Moore."

"Norah?" he cried, starting forward.

"No! Mr. Brown."

An angry exclamation escaped Brian.

"He is a good, true-hearted man, and more to be pitied than *you* are," said Mrs. Maynes, gravely; "go and see him."

The two men were a strange contrast. One tall, handsome, noble-looking, the other small, slight, and nervous in manner. He was a great man for all that, very frank and open, and his face was a study as he said:

"Sir, I did not know I had nearly robbed you of a treasure you can never prize too highly. We have both been cheated, but never by *her*. Norah is yours, and I am going back now to bring her to greater happiness than I could have given her."

A few hours later, happy, blushing Norah became Mrs. Maynes' grateful guest. Captain Fitzgerald disappeared ignominiously, and in a very little while Brian took his beautiful bride to Limerick, where Terry shared the honours of their simple home, idolised by the sister he had saved from misery.

It is a curious fact that Lottie was so impressed by the generosity and nobleness of Mr. Brown's character, she gave up mentioning "soap." Also, two years later she became Mrs. Brown and brought her good husband to live at Holmwood, which gradually resumed more than its former prosperous grandeur. Mrs. Maynes thoroughly admires her son-in-law, and the little Browns are charming children.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

FRANZ LISZT.

A MAN like Franz Liszt, who has come before us at the age of seventy-five, clothed with honour and with the purpose of his life achieved, is a character we English delight in. It is, therefore, no idle curiosity which induces us to gather up all that can be told of him by those who have known him intimately, for it is by studying such a life that those who are starting on the race can also hope to win.

To begin at the beginning. Franz Liszt has both Magyar and German blood in his veins. His mother, Anna Lager, was born in Krems, a little distance from Vienna, while his father, Adam Liszt, was the descendant of an ancient and noble Hungarian family. Having no estate, he was compelled to earn an independence, and was fortunate enough to obtain the situation of steward in the palace of Prince Esterhazy, and in the village of Raiding, near Oedenburg, he married and settled in a modest little home.

Adam Liszt had a passionate love for music and art, which his daily occupations left him little time to indulge in. Yet every spare moment was used to such effect that he could play all stringed instruments, as well as the flute and pianoforte; and one or other of these he usually played at the services in the chapel attached to the palace.

Haydn was Kapellmeister to Prince Esterhazy and Hummel Concertmeister at the period of Liszt's stewardship, and between these three men there existed a great friendship. It was here also that he made the acquaintance of Cherubini and other famous masters.

What wonder that Adam Liszt recognised with intense joy the love of music in his little son Franz, who was born in the year of the comet 1811, in the month of October? The child was brought up in an atmosphere of harmony, and his easily excited imagination was fed and impressed by the home and church music, and by the wild, fantastic melodies of the Gipsies, who not infrequently rested in the village. The boy knew his notes before he had mastered the alphabet, and would steal away from his playmates to his father's pianoforte.

From the age of six he seemed to have neither life nor enjoyment out of his music, and applied himself to it with such passionate energy that his mother became alarmed for his health. He was found one day regarding a portrait of Beethoven, which hung on the wall of the living-room, and addressing it, said, with all the earnestness of a vow: "*One day I mean to be like you.*"

Speedily and with steady purpose he went forward, astounding

everyone by his manipulation of the piano, by his reading at sight and by his power of improvising.

He was only nine years old when he played at a public concert at Oedenburg, with such success that he was at once secured for a concert which was to be given in the Prince's Palace at Presburg. This concert was attended by a most musical and artistic audience, as well as by many Hungarian nobles, who were so struck and delighted with the boy's talent that they guaranteed him £60 a year for six years to enable him to continue his studies under the best masters.

It would have been difficult to find a happier boy than Franz Liszt when he heard of his good fortune. All he wanted was opportunity of study; for he never wavered in the purpose of his life; never lost confidence in his power to achieve it, with God's help; and never doubted his power to return in a measure the tenderness, care, and self.sacrifice of his parents.

This generosity of the Hungarian nobles brought about an entire change in the life of the Liszts. The boy must seek the best masters wherever they were to be found; and the father, therefore, resigned his appointment as steward, and broke up his little home, to enable him and his wife to accompany Franz.

So to Vienna they went and dwelt there two years, while Franz took lessons on the piano from Czerny, and in composition from Salieri and Randhartinger.

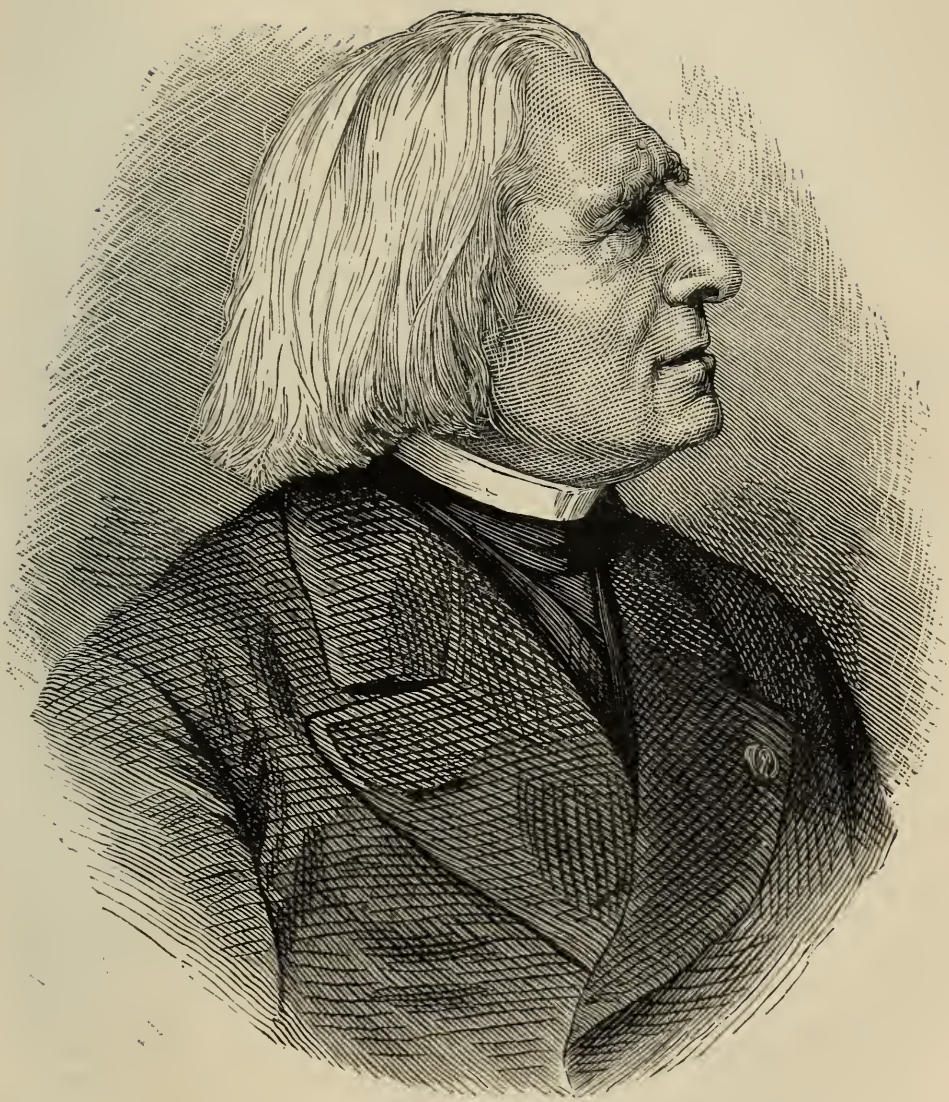
Two concerts were given in Vienna for the purpose of introducing the lad of fourteen to the people of this music-loving city. Beethoven, who rarely at this time appeared in public, was among the audience, and was so delighted with the boy's extraordinary talent that he went on to the platform, and, before the crowded assembly, took Franz in his arms and kissed him.

These concerts were a great success and provided Adam Liszt with the means to take Franz to Paris, and thus fulfil his heart's desire that his boy should enter the Conservatoire and complete his studies under Cherubini.

They came to Paris, but Cherubini would not relax the law of the Conservatoire, which was that no foreigner should be admitted.

"My father and I," writes the boy "besought very earnestly that the law for once might be set aside, but it was of no avail. I was miserable and not to be comforted; everything seemed lost to me, and I believed there was nowhere any hope for me." Fortunately he succeeded in securing for his teachers Paer and Raicha, with whom he studied composition, and so was able to make his way without the help of the Conservatoire.

The letters of introduction he carried from the Hungarian nobles opened the salons of the Parisian aristocracy to their protégé, and the Duchesse de Berry and the Duke of Orleans, afterwards Louis Philippe, took him specially under their protection. Le Petit Litz,



FRANZ LISZT.

as he was called, was the hero of the day, the pet of the nobility, the artists and the learned ; in short, of all cultivated Paris.

Just as the press in Vienna, in Munich and in Stutgardt had lauded him, so now did the Paris journals, especially after his appearing at a concert in 1824 at the Italian Opera. He was declared to be the "first pianoforte player in Europe, the child beyond compare, whose bewitching elegance, charm of mind and manner, kind heart and aristocratic bearing had taken captive the hearts of all." Soon Le Petit Litz became known as a composer ; and his opera in one act called "La Sancho ; or, The Castle of Love," was brought out at the Académie Royale, in October, 1825, amid such a storm of applause that the actor who played the chief character, when called before the curtain, took up the fourteen-year-old composer in his arms and thus presented him to the enthusiastic audience.*

During the next two years he made artistic tours in Switzerland and in the French Provinces ; he also came twice to England in 1824 and 1825, accompanied by Erard. George IV. showed him much kindness during these visits.

In May and June, 1827, he played at the Philharmonic concerts in London. His reception was not so enthusiastic as on previous occasions, and his agent suffered a loss, which Liszt, with his usual generosity, made good.

It was just after this visit that he went to Boulogne, accompanied by his father, to take sea baths and to get some little rest. While there, Adam Liszt died suddenly. Overwhelmed with sorrow as Franz was, he did not forget that upon him now lay the responsibility of providing for his mother, who had stayed in Austria while he and his father had been travelling from place to place. So he sent for her at once to Paris, where, at the expense of his ambition, he supported her in comfort by giving pianoforte lessons.

He rarely now appeared in public, and gave himself up to morbid sensitiveness. From this unhealthy state he was suddenly and thoroughly roused by his first love-dream. He fell in love with Caroline, Countess St. Erig, the daughter of the Minister of the Interior. But notwithstanding that the love was mutual, she could not be his wife, as her father had already promised her in marriage.

Again, as in the days of sorrow after his father's death, he withdrew from the world and would have entered a monastery but for the pleading of his mother, to whom he was ever tender and obedient.

It was the July revolution that roused him and once more set him free to work and mix again in society, when he became acquainted with Berlioz and Chopin, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, and Georges Sand. His ambition also was most thoroughly roused by the appearance in Paris of Paganini, whose power over the violin he desired to equal, nay surpass, on the pianoforte.

* This, the only opera of Liszt, was burnt in the fire which occurred in the Opera Library.

Franz Liszt, in speaking of Paganini, says that his playing made him understand what the true mission of a musician should be, viz.—not to use his art for egotistical profit and advantage, but on the contrary to make it a power of sympathy, uniting and binding the hearts of men together, to use it as a means of inspiring in them the love of the beautiful, the noble, and the holy.

In quiet and incessant work the time went by until, in 1834, he made the acquaintance of the Countess d'Agoult, better known by the name of Daniel Stern. This lady, who died in 1876, was the mother of his three children, one of whom is the widow of Richard Wagner. It was in this year, 1834, that he again appeared at concerts, and made good his title to the first rank of pianists.

"It is difficult," says La Mara, "to talk of Liszt's playing to those who have never heard him. His playing is a revelation." "The instrument glows and sparkles under his hands," says Schumann. And Mendelssohn, writing of him, declares: "I have never seen a musician like Liszt, in whom feeling and sentiment seem to run to the fingertips and pour out in an unchecked stream." In Liszt's own words: "My pianoforte is myself, my speech, my life."

After this year of success in Paris, 1834, he lived in retirement at Geneva for two or three years, until he was mastered by the desire of once again living a public life. From 1839 to 1847 he travelled about from place to place, triumph and honour following ever at his heels. He was decked with orders and titles by pope and princes, such enthusiasm as he excited had never been heard of. Suddenly, in the midst of all this, he became weary of triumphs; he seemed impressed with the vanity of it all, and longed for a quiet home; and, to the astonishment of everyone, he settled down in the little town of Weimar in 1849, as conductor of the Court Theatre. Here he became the universal attraction, not only of Germany, but of all countries. When Liszt settled in Weimar it was with the purpose of bringing before the public such works as had in themselves great merit, but which had had no opportunity of being produced on any stage. Among these were "Lohengrin," "Tannhäuser," "Manfred," and "Benvenuto Cellini."

Wagner in his time of sickness, misery and despair owed much to the kindness and appreciation of Liszt. He himself says: "When in Paris, sick and ill, my eye fell on "Lohengrin," I felt a sort of compassion that this music should never appear from off the death-pale paper; so I wrote two words to Liszt, whose answer was that preparations were being made to produce it on the largest scale that the limited means of Weimar would allow." Again he relates how "while resting in Thuringia for a few days, uncertain whether I must fly from Germany, I saw Liszt conducting a rehearsal of my "Tannhäuser," and was astonished at recognising my second self in the achievement. What I had felt in inventing this music, he felt in performing it. What I wanted to express in writing it down, he expressed in making it sound. Strange

to say, through the love of this rarest friend, I gained, at the moment of becoming homeless, a real home for my art, which I had hitherto longed for and sought for always in the wrong place."

Liszt dwelt in Weimar until 1859, when, owing to some opposition to the production of an opera, he resigned his appointment and went on a long visit to his mother, who still lived in Paris. He went to Rome in 1861 and, four years later received the title of Abbé, became a monk of the Franciscan Order, and dwelt for a whole year in the Vatican. Pio Nono had a great admiration for him, calling him his son, his Palestrina.

In 1869 Liszt returned to Germany, and paid long yearly visits to Weimar. The Grand Duke presented him with a house beautifully situated in the midst of the park, and here, says Amy Fay, "he lives elegantly and free of expense, whenever he chooses to come to it. One of the rooms in this house has been furnished and put in order by the Grand Duchess herself. All Weimar adores him. When he walks out he bows to everybody just like a king. No wonder that he is loved and honoured, for never has man done so much to help young artists. His heart and purse have been ever open to them, his time and experience always at their disposal. Since 1847 his life has been exclusively consecrated to the benefit of others, to artistic undertakings, and to charitable objects." All who are interested in this great master should read La Mara's "Musikalische Studienköppe" and Amy Fay's "Music Study in Germany." Her pictures of Liszt and his every-day life in Weimar are most vivid and fascinating.

Our enthusiasm at his reappearance, after an absence of nearly half a century, has been a marvellous testimony to the power that must have shone out in his early life; the earnestness and quiet strength of his purpose: influences that seem to have followed him even in his retirement. From the Queen, who commanded his attendance at Windsor Castle and hastened to do him honour, down to the humblest of her artistic subjects, there has been the desire to express admiration for a life nobly lived, a purpose perfectly fulfilled. Who that heard him quietly improvising at the rehearsal of St. Elizabeth will ever forget the thrill with which he listened to those first notes struck by the hand that in England had been silent for more than half a lifetime? Or the wave of emotion that swept over him on the following night, as Liszt's appearance was greeted over and over again by storms and tempests of applause? Few people living can compare the Liszt of fifty years ago with the Liszt of to-day as he has stood before us: but the face with age can only have gained an added charm: the charm of a heart and mind at rest after its work: the quiet serenity of the evening of a life spent in artistic abours and in doing good to his fellow men.

E Brewer.

THE MAJOR.

By C. Haddon Chambers.

MAJOR DYMPLE is an old traveller. As he has visited almost every country in the known world, he has plenty of experiences to relate; and, what is more uncommon, he possesses the knack of relating them well. Get the Major in a good humour—and it is not difficult to do so if you are fortunate enough to dine with him—and you may depend upon an interesting story.

I had been dining with Major Dymple at the club one evening, and we had been talking philosophically of ocean voyages and "boardship" life. I felt certain that the subject would recall to the Major's memory an interesting experience, and I was not disappointed. With the cigars came the following singular story, which I must take the liberty of relating in my own way; filling in, for the reader's satisfaction, many details, such as I imagine them to have been, and which my friend's susceptibilities prompted him to omit.

In 1880 the Major found himself in Australia. He had been away from home for three years, during which he had "done" the two Americas, India, China, Japan, and the far East generally. Cape Colony, the East and West coasts, Egypt, Arabia and the Holy Land he had done in former times; while he could almost count his scampers over the Continent by dozens. Since landing in Australia, too, he had spent four months in cruising among the islands of the South Pacific.

It is no wonder, then, that when he came to himself in Melbourne in 1880, the Major began to long for home and rest. He was sated with travel. He reflected, with shame, that he knew many countries more intimately than his own. He knew the Mall, Whitehall, Aldershot, Wimbledon, Brighton, Goodwood, and a few other places, but he had never been up the Grampian Hills or down a Lancashire coal mine; to the Lakes of Killarney or the Giant's Causeway in the sister isle. The Major acknowledged to himself that it was a man's duty to see his own country before wandering about other people's, and he felt remorseful.

Then came the mournful thought that he was no longer twenty-five, but within a very few years of twice that age. Great heavens! In a little over twenty years more he would have lived the allotted span, and he was still unmarried—no provision made for the respectable domestic comforts old age demands. He had his income of fourteen hundred a-year—sufficient for all natural comforts—but age without companionship would be unbearable. He looked in the mirror, and was startled at the quantity of grey hair that was to be seen among the brown. Had he remained at home, he thought

bitterly, he would have had plenty of kind friends to tell him how grey he was getting. In short, being for the first time in his life terribly home-sick—a moral ailment which might frequently be traced to physical causes—the Major resolved to arise and depart.

No sooner was the resolution taken than my friend, a man of action and impulse, began to make it good. A glance at the morning paper told him that the fates were propitious. In two days the R.M.S. *Iberia* would sail for London, viâ the Suez Canal. In half-an-hour the Major was at the agent's office, looking over a plan of the *Iberia's* saloon. With the discretion of an old traveller he selected the most comfortable and the best situated of the vacant state rooms; then he paid the fare, received his ticket, drove back to his hotel, and began to pack up his wisely limited luggage. A visit to the bank, hurried calls upon two or three of the few friends he had made, messages of regret to those he was unable to see, and then the Major shook Australian dust from his feet, and rowed off to the *Iberia*. When the big ship steamed through Port Phillip Heads our friend was as comfortably settled on board as though he had lived there all his life.

During the first few days Major Dymple kept himself well in reserve. He knew too well the folly of making sudden friendships, especially on board ship, where, if a little patience and observation is exercised, the true characters of one's fellow passengers will very soon be disclosed. The passenger-ship is a splendid field for the student of human nature.

Major Dymple was less a student of human nature than a student of self-comfort. The latter it was his practice to study with considerable earnestness; and, accordingly, he refrained from getting mixed up too intimately with people who upon further acquaintance might prove to be objectionable. As a matter of policy he made himself agreeable to the officers, and he seized an early opportunity of cracking a bottle of dry Monopole with the captain.

Several days passed. The usual call was made at Adelaide, and a scamper on shore was afforded. Then the *Iberia* steamed along the great Australian bight in beautiful weather, rounded the usually turbulent "Leeuwin" in a calm—the stormy cape was caught asleep for once—and began to plough her way N.N.W. across the placid breast of the Indian ocean.

It was not till then that the cautious Major permitted himself to be on friendly terms with any of the passengers. Three men in the saloon he found to be very decent fellows. They were gentlemen, and they played cards—two first-rate recommendations. Among the ladies there was one only who attracted our traveller's attention: a widow, blonde, beautiful and clever, and certainly not more than thirty.

Now the Major was very susceptible to female loveliness, especially when it was accompanied by wit. It was accident and the wandering

life he had led, and not want of inclination, that accounted for his not having been permanently caught in the silken toils of the gentle sex years ago.

It must not be imagined for one moment that his celibacy was the consequence of an unattractive appearance. .So far from that being the case the Major was generally considered a handsome man. A tall, manly figure, with broad shoulders, deep chest, and straight, muscular limbs; a well-set head, clothed with thick brown hair besprinkled with grey; a face well shaped and closely shaven, with fine brown eyes, and clear-cut aquiline features; a distinguished bearing, courtly manners, and a smile which disclosed white, even teeth, all contributed to a personality which excited admiration in women and envy in men. Years have the same improving effect upon some men as upon wine. The Major was one of those men. He was much better looking at forty-five than he had been in his twenties.

Of all the men on board who were attentive to Mrs. Flemington: and they included the captain, the officers, and all the grass-widowers and unmarried men in the saloon: the Major was the least demonstrative and the most successful. He sat opposite to her at table, furtively and admiringly watching the play of her mobile features, and the changing lights in her big grey-blue eyes. He sat near and chatted with her on deck, enjoying the brightness of her wit and the keenness of her intelligence; he fetched books for her from the library, frequently choosing them himself; he turned over her music at the piano, and occasionally—having a light, easy, baritone voice and a good ear—sang duets with her. He did all these things in a quiet, unostentatious manner: and in the same quiet, unostentatious manner he sank deeply in love with the charming widow.

Perhaps Mrs. Flemington was also in love, but it was not quite certain. Although she had plenty of dignity: with the power, too, of exercising it very sharply when occasion required (as more than one presumptuous wight on board could ruefully testify) she unbent to the handsome Major, and it was very apparent that she enjoyed his society. Perhaps, having already experienced one courtship, she endeavoured to compare her feelings then and now, and was unable to determine their relative depth and value. Perhaps, woman-like, she was merely enjoying the companionship of the most agreeable man on board, without troubling to analyse her feelings, or give the matter any serious thought at all.

Not so the Major. He was playing Napoleon in the smoking-room one night, when he observed that he had allowed one of his opponents to go three when he had a certain four in his own hand. Such an absurd thing had never happened to him before. "What could I have been thinking of?" he mused, abstractedly shuffling the cards. The answer came readily. "Of Mrs. Flemington." "Then," reasoned the Major very properly, "if I, a devoted card-player, was

thinking of Mrs. Flemington instead of the game, I must surely be in love."

Such a serious discovery justified the Major in complaining of headache, and retiring from the card-table to the saloon deck. Walking slowly up and down, he proceeded to think the matter out. Now that he had come to himself, as it were, he knew, he felt, that he was in love. A troubled but not unpleasant feeling in the neighbourhood of his heart told him that it was but too true.

He had experienced the same feeling several times before, but in a much milder degree. On such occasions he had fought with and conquered it, or taken refuge in flight. But he was no longer young and had less fight in him, and flight was impossible. Nor, to tell the truth, had he a particular inclination for either. Why should he? Had he not come to the conclusion in Melbourne that it was time he settled down in life? Was he not too old to wander about the world unloved and uncared for? To settle down with, and be loved and cared for by Mrs. Flemington was a destiny to be desired. True there was a slight disparity in their ages, but a man is as old as he feels, and a woman is as old as she looks. The Major felt thirty-five, and Mrs. Flemington looked a young thirty—a very suitable difference indeed! They had both travelled, and were a man and woman of the world—another circumstance to be reckoned among the *pros*. A woman of experience and worldly wisdom, the Major concluded, would be a more congenial companion for him than a modern society young lady.

With his usual courage and promptitude Major Dymple decided to seize the first favourable opportunity of proposing to Mrs. Flemington: reserving to himself, however, the right of first discreetly questioning her aunt—a genial, garrulous old lady who accompanied her—as to their social position.

"Of course I know nothing of her," he murmured to himself: "and," his sense of justice obliged him to add, "she knows nothing of me. She may be penniless, but, hang it! I have enough for two moderate people."

With which generous thought he retired to bed.

The next afternoon the Major secured a quiet *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Flemington's aunt. It required very little diplomacy or tact to elicit the desired information, for the old lady, besides her garrulity, was very ingenuous, and great on family history. Had it been necessary, the interested inquirer might have heard the story of the Lincolnshire house of Dornoccar, of which Mrs. Flemington was a daughter, from the days of Rufus. Sufficient, however, that the family was old, reputable, and proud, though in the latter days comparatively poor, in consequence, of course, of an ancestor's unswerving and unselfish allegiance to the first Charles. Further, the Major learned that the late lamented Flemington had been a barrister. He had settled in Queensland for the sake of his health, which was very delicate, and

there had left his wife a widow two years since. All this, to which should be added the intimation that Mrs. Flemington had an income quite sufficient for her needs, was eminently satisfactory.

The Major was constrained to unbosom himself at once. He gave a faithful account of his circumstances, and told of his attachment. The old lady betrayed no surprise. She had seen the way the wind was blowing for some days, and she frankly confessed that she had formed a good opinion of the Major, which she believed her niece shared. But she deprecated haste. Mrs. Flemington was entirely her own mistress, and the Major could speak to her, if he liked, of course; but the old lady thought it would be proper and advisable to wait until the friendship had ripened; at least until they reached England and knew more of each other.

The Major admitted that there was reason in what the old lady said, but he did not pledge himself to follow her advice. On the contrary he secretly resolved to strike while the iron was hot. He was not the only suitor Mrs. Flemington had on board. The Major saw a probable rival, and a formidable one, in a certain Mr. Sparkle, one of the card players, young, handsome, and reported to be wealthy. Mr. Sparkle was a buoyant, amusing fellow, and the Major remembered with a pang of anxiety that the fair widow always had a hearty laugh for his nonsense and buffoonery. No! there was certainly no time to be lost.

The Major could find no opportunity of carrying out his intention that day, but he determined to be more successful on the next, even if he had to descend to the conventional "Can you spare me a few moments' private conversation?" to secure a *tête-à-tête.* Later in the evening he tried to divert himself at cards with Sparkle and the rest, and in a couple of hours his abstraction cost him ten guineas.

At midnight he retired, leaving his companions, who seemed bent on making a night of it, still playing.

The Major had slept about two hours, and was in the most interesting part of a beautiful dream, in which Mrs. Flemington figured as heroine, when he was awakened by a noise in the cabin. It was Sparkle and one of his companions, both in a somewhat elevated condition.

"Are you awake, Major?" whispered Sparkle.

"No, I'm not," grunted our hero.

"We have run short of liquor—want a night-cap before turning in—thought you might have some."

"Flask in lower bunk," answered the Major from under the bedclothes.

"Thanks, old fellow."

In a hazy sort of way the Major thought it was like their confounded impertinence to come into his cabin in the middle of the night; but before he had time to get angry he fell asleep again.

"Here it is!" announced Sparkle, after groping about the lower bunk for a minute.

"Out with it," answered his companion. "Got a glass?"

"No. Sure to be one here somewhere. Let's see. Ah, here we are. Hullo! it's full of water."

"Chuck it out of the port-hole."

It being a terribly hot night, the Major was sleeping with the port-hole open. Leaning over the bunk, and being careful not to disturb the sleeper, Mr. Sparkle threw the contents of the tumbler into the Indian Ocean.

Then the two gentlemen, with ludicrous solemnity, drank the Major's health.

"Good fellow, the Major," remarked Sparkle, gratefully: and the pair stumbled out of the cabin, and made for their respective quarters.

The Major was an early riser, and when at nine the next morning he had not left his cabin his steward ventured to knock at the door.

There was no reply, so the steward rapped a little louder.

"What is it?" asked a muffled voice.

"Nine o'clock, sir."

"All right."

But when another hour passed, without the Major appearing, the steward suspected that it was not all right. He knocked again.

"Well!"

"Shall I bring you some breakfast, sir?"

"No."

"Are you unwell, sir?"

"Yes," after a pause.

"Shall I send the doctor to you, sir?"

"No." Then while the steward hesitated, the voice added, with some asperity: "Go away."

Six bells had struck. It was past ten, and the Major had not yet been seen on deck. This was so unlike him that Mrs. Flemington's pretty head was full of perplexity.

"Have you seen Major Dymple?" she asked of Mr. Sparkle, who had taken advantage of the absence of his rival to ensconce himself at her side.

"No, I've not."

"Have you made any enquiries about him?"

"Well, no. We're very good friends, but I must confess to being a little selfish, and I have felt his absence this morning to be rather an advantage."

"I'm sure that Major Dymple would never feel your absence to be an advantage," said Mrs. Flemington, coolly.

Mr. Sparkle winced. "Shall I look him up?" he asked, hastily.

"If you wish," replied the widow, indifferently.

"No, it's if *you* wish."

"When I have a message to send I shall have no difficulty in finding a messenger." And Mrs. Flemington opened her book, and appeared to lose the knowledge of Mr. Sparkle's existence.

Another knock, and a loud one, at the Major's door.

"Who is it?"

"Your own Sparkle. May he enter?"

"No."

"Oh, hang it!" muttered the young gentleman. "That's the second knock in the eye I've had to-day. I must pay him out for that. Are you feeling seedy, Major?"

"Very."

"You should be careful of yourself." The voice, if not the words, hinted at the Major's grey hairs. "You shouldn't have slept with the port-hole open last night. Have you caught cold?"

"Yes."

"That's bad. You really must take more care of yourself. Shall you be on deck presently?"

"No."

"So bad as that? Two or three people have been enquiring after you."

"Who?" asked the Major, with ill-concealed eagerness.

"Well, let me see now," answered the malicious Sparkle, thoughtfully. "The second officer—he asked; so did Blake; and, yes, so did Johnstone."

The Major groaned inwardly, and turning his face to the wall, or rather to the ship's side, he spoke no more.

Mr. Sparkle returned on deck, and found Mrs. Flemington where he had left her. Taking a seat by her side, he looked grave.

"I'm afraid the Major's in a bad way," he said.

"What is the matter with him?" asked the widow, hastily.

"I can scarcely say. You see, he's very reckless—slept with his port-hole open last night, and in consequence has caught a severe cold. Very dangerous thing, a cold! I didn't see him, but we had a long conversation through the door."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Flemington.

"Well, I should have said that *I* had the conversation. He said nothing but 'yes' once or twice, and 'no' several times. Do you know, I fear the Major has not a very even temper."

"I have not remarked it," said Mrs. Flemington. "But I remember now that Major Dymple confided to me one day that the only being able to ruffle his temper is a bore; and do you know, Mr. Sparkle, I quite sympathise with him." Whereupon Mrs. Flemington returned to her book.

The day passed without the Major leaving his cabin. Some luncheon and dinner was brought him by the steward, but sent away barely touched. On the following morning, as he still did not appear,

the doctor was sent to him. The visit lasted for a few minutes only. When Mrs. Flemington met the doctor on deck afterwards she anxiously enquired after the patient.

"Is the Major better, doctor?"

"There is no change in his condition."

"Is it a dangerous illness?"

"Oh no! not at all. It is an inconvenient and unpleasant attack, but it is neither dangerous nor, fortunately, contagious."

"Then Major Dymple will be on deck again soon?"

"I fear not," replied the doctor. "In fact I don't think we will see much of him for the rest of the voyage."

Mrs. Flemington looked very disappointed.

"Is Major Dymple subject to these attacks?" asked her aunt, who had just joined them.

"I don't think he has ever had one before," replied the doctor.

"And is he suffering?" asked the widow, tenderly.

"Acutely; but not physically. His sufferings are of the mind." And to avoid further questioning the doctor beat a retreat.

"This sudden indisposition of the Major's is very singular," remarked the old lady. "Perhaps I ought to tell you, my dear, that Major Dymple confided to me his intention of proposing to you. I advised him not to be too hasty; to wait until you had seen more of each other. He has evidently not spoken to you on the subject, or you would have told me."

"No, he has not," replied Mrs. Flemington, with a heightened colour.

"I think you like him," said the old lady, who was at heart a match-maker.

"I like him very much," answered her niece, simply.

Mrs. Flemington spent a very dull day. Sparkle devoted himself to her, but failed to enliven her. His wittiest sallies fell dismally flat; his most ludicrous absurdities were received with sadness. In the evening, however, he was more successful. As they sat on deck together at about half past ten Mr. Sparkle joked and Mrs Flemington laughed. Suddenly they saw a tall and unmistakable figure, wrapped in a long overcoat. The widow involuntarily rose to her feet.

"Is that you, Major Dymple?"

There was no reply. The figure quickly disappeared.

"Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!" quoted Sparkle.

Mrs. Flemington retired to her cabin in anger and mortification, having made up her mind that the Major's illness was a pretence, and that his object was to avoid her.

An hour later the Major again appeared on deck, and looked cautiously around. He could bear the confinement of his cabin no longer. He wanted fresh air and exercise. As the saloon deck

was now deserted, he paced quickly up and down. His thoughts were very bitter. He had heard Mrs. Flemington laughing—laughing gaily, while she knew that he was ill. He used to enjoy her merriment; but the silvery peals he had just heard stabbed him to the soul, for they were occasioned by the witticisms of his rival: and, torturing thought! they were possibly at his expense.

Pausing in his walk the Major leaned over the stern, and gazed at the agitated water beneath. One little slip—a quiet vault over the taffrail, and in a very few minutes he would be miles astern, floating alone on the great wilderness of water, to sink at last, murmuring the name of one fair, false woman, to a lonely resting-place in the cold, hungry deep. Or, less poetic thought, he might be caught in the arms of the propeller, and crushed out of existence in its revolvings. But in either case the effect would be the same: Mrs. Flemington would be doomed to a life-long remorse.

Satisfied with the pleasant fancy, the Major resumed his walk, and in a few moments he was, with singular inconsistency, mentally consigning his deadliest enemy, Mr. Sparkle, to the happy fate he had sketched out for himself.

The Major was not the only restless soul abroad that night. He suddenly discovered that there was a man pacing the second saloon deck, whom, in his preoccupation, he had not hitherto observed. Occasionally they met in their walk at the railing which divided the two decks, and the Major became seized with a longing to address his fellow watcher. Must there not be a bond of sympathy between them, that they two, of all the passengers, should seek that quiet hour for solitude and reflection? Our hero at that moment would have fled upon the approach of the Captain, Mrs. Flemington, Mr. Sparkle, or any of his friends, but he would have gladly chatted with the cook, or the baker, or anyone he had not met before. His forty-eight hours' confinement made him long for companionship, and so he was drawn toward this stranger of the second saloon. Accordingly he hazarded "It's a beautiful night" when they next met at the railing.

The stranger responded with alacrity. He was a very small and very attenuated man, with a pale, lean face, straight black hair, an aggressive nose, and bright dark eyes which suggested a restless, sanguine spirit too big for the weak little body.

"It is indeed a beautiful night, sir. The man who elects to stew in a hot, stuffy cabin on such a night is wanting in taste and poetic feeling."

Without pausing to consider to what extent he merited this indirect compliment, the Major accepted it graciously.

"I quite agree with you, sir," he said. "Midnight on the ocean is a seductive, dreamy hour."

"It is certainly the hour for the dreamer," replied the stranger, looking up at the stars—"and I am a dreamer. Physical insignificance, a limited education, lack of golden opportunity, and a con-

dition in life inexorably glued to the commonplace—in short, fate has shut me out from the possibility of soaring. But I have my dreams. I encourage and foster them ; I steal away by myself and gloat over them, and am happy. Now I have the might and courage of Achilles; in an hour I have woven for myself as adventurous a career as that of Ulysses. At one time I am a second Shakespeare ; at another the mantle of Charles Dickens has fallen upon me. I have been all things — poet, priest, politician, philosopher, scientist, soldier, navigator and king ; and as each and all I have been pre-eminent. I have dwelt in yon golden planets, and I have penetrated the most hidden depths of this mighty ocean. I have tracked the tiger through the jungle to his lair ; and in the desert I have taken the lion by the beard and slain him. I have—well, I'm afraid I have succeeded in boring you."

"Not at all," answered the Major; "on the contrary, I am deeply interested. But I confess to being surprised that a man of your very evident abilities should confine himself to dreaming. Small stature cannot be a good excuse for inaction when we remember that many of the greatest men that ever lived were of small, and even weakly frames. How often has it been proved that a great spirit may conquer any physical disability. Remember that 'the mind's the standard of the man,' and ——"

"Stay, sir," interrupted the little man. "Do not condemn one without a fair hearing. I told you just now that my life is trammelled by a multitude of commonplaces. Let me give you a few examples. Commonplace number one—my name is John Jobson."

"And a very good name too," interjected the Major.

"Your politeness does you honour," replied Mr. Jobson, smiling. "Granted then, for the sake of argument only, that John Jobson is a euphonious cognomen. Let us proceed. Commonplace number two, I am, and always have been, poor. Commonplace number three, I am a dentist!"

The Major started as though Mr. Jobson had discharged a pistol in his face. Had the gods offered to grant him the realisation of one wish, he would have said "send me a dentist." And this weird little man seemed to have dropped from the skies to his deliverance. Then the Major's ecstasy became chilled by the reflection that a dentist in his consulting room and workshop, and the same individual on board ship were two very different things. Mr. Jobson might object to practising under the circumstances: or, very probably, he had not the necessary paraphernalia with him.

"You appear surprised," remarked Mr. Jobson. "Am I to infer that I have met an unfortunate brother professional?"

"You have met an unfortunate," replied the Major, "but not a brother professional. Have you not noticed that I keep this wrap over my mouth, and that my speech is terribly imperfect. Never did a man stand in more urgent need of your skill than I."

"What is the trouble?" asked Mr. Jobson, suddenly becoming as practical as he had hitherto been the reverse. "Allow me to see for myself."

Diving under the railing, Mr. Jobson led his patient to the nearest light. The tall man stooping, with distended jaws, while the little man, with hat thrown back, peered earnestly into his mouth, was a humorous spectacle, and it was well for the Major's tender sensibilities that they were unobserved.

"Magnificent teeth, those you have," remarked Mr. Jobson, admiringly; "but you've lost three in the top row, and almost full in front. What a difference it must make to your appearance?"

"I should rather think it did," said the Major, with considerable emphasis.

"Bar accidents, your teeth will live longer than you. How could you have lost the missing ones."

"Those provided by nature were kicked out at football over twenty years ago," replied the Major; "the admirable substitutes furnished by your useful profession are now at the bottom of the ocean."

"At the bottom of the ocean!" echoed Mr. Jobson, in amazement.

"Exactly. Perhaps the plate has gone to supply a deficiency in the mouth of some aged shark. This is how it happened. Two half tipsy fellows came into my cabin in the middle of the night in search of drink. I directed them to a flask of whiskey which was in the lower bunk, and fell asleep again, but I have an indistinct recollection of one of them leaning over me to empty something through the port-hole. In the morning, the tumbler of scented water which had contained my teeth was empty. Of course, under the circumstances I could not appear among the passengers again, and I have had it given out that I am indisposed. Mr. Jobson, you are the only man on board who can do anything for me. Believe me the happiness of at least one other besides myself depends upon you."

"The difficulty would be to find a workshop," said Mr. Jobson, thoughtfully; "but perhaps the doctor would assist us in that."

"The doctor will place every facility at your disposal, I am sure," replied the Major, eagerly. "He is in my confidence."

"Then you may look upon the thing as done, as, fortunately, I have everything necessary in a portmanteau in my cabin. I will match your teeth in the morning early, and by noon on the following day you will be yourself again."

"How shall I ever reward you?" cried the Major, grasping the little man's hand in his gratitude. "You shall name your own fee, besides having made a staunch friend for life."

"My fee will be the usual one," replied Mr. Jobson, calmly. "But that necessity forbids it, I should make no charge at all, for yours is the only case I have met in my homely profession in which there has been a spice of novelty and interest. But perhaps I may one day ask a favour of you. I am writing a book: you may be kind

enough when it is completed to permit its publication under your patronage."

The Major declared that he would be only too delighted, and he further pledged himself to take one hundred copies of the work.

"I know it's very presumptuous of me," Sparkle was saying to Mrs Flemington two days after the events recorded; "but for the life of me I can't help it. I love you, upon my honour I do, most dearly."

"I don't doubt your word, Mr. Sparkle," answered the widow, calmly.

"I've been trying to pluck up courage to speak to you for days."

"Just four days?" suggested the lady, smiling.

"Well about that time"—and the young man changed colour—"but you're not listening seriously to me. You little know ——"

Mr. Sparkle stopped abruptly. His hated and powerful rival approached, erect and dignified, along the deck. The Major paused in front of them, smiling the well-known beautiful smile, and disclosing the well-known beautiful teeth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Flemington? Mr. Sparkle how are you?"

Sparkle rose from his seat and offered his hand. The Major favoured him with a hearty, revengeful grip which made his fingers tingle for an hour afterwards, and coolly sank into the vacant chair. Swallowing his rage, Mr. Sparkle retired. Before the night closed, Major Dymple had vowed away his bachelorship, and Mrs. Flemington her widowhood.

In the course of time Mr. Jobson's book was given to the world. It consisted of a number of poems under the title of "Dreams: by a Dreamer," and it was inscribed with the name of Major Dymple. Copies are now very scarce.

A BROWN STUDY.

Let them sing of their primrose and cowslip,
Their daffodil-gold-coloured hair,
Their blue-bells, blue eyes, and white violets,
All the pale dreamy things they find fair;
Give me stir of brown leaves in the sunshine,
The whir of brown wings in the beet,
The rush of brown hares through the stubble,
And the light in brown eyes of my sweet!

Gold hair? Well—I never could love it,
Yet gold, I suppose, has its worth;
The head that I love is as dusky
As the breast of our mother, the earth.
With a gleam like the shine of wet sea-weed,
Round pools that the tide has left clear,
And warm, like the breast of a linnet,
And as brown, is the hair of my dear.

From edge of the cliff we look downwards
On the shore, and the bay, and the town,
And brown is the short turf we lean on,
The fishing-boats' sails are all brown:
The sky may be blue—that's the background,
But the picture itself, to be fair—
However it's shaded and varied—
Should be brown as the dress that you wear!

A lark bursts to sudden-sweet singing—
That tuft of brown grass is his home—
And now, a brown speck, he is rising
Against the clear windy sky-dome;
And he sings—How I know? Love instructs me
To know all his notes, what they mean—
That it isn't the colour I care for
But yourself—O my gipsy, my Queen.

Ah! the lark knows my heart—I his language:
It's my heart he sings out to the skies;
It is *you* that I love, and what matter
The colour of hair or of eyes?
No doubt I should love you as dearly
Were your hair like an apricot's down;
And your eyes like the grey of the morning—
But I'm glad, all the same, that they're brown!

E. Nesbit.

M. L. GOW.
J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

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LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER XX.

DOWN AT ALTCAR.

IT was mid-noon when Eustace Stannard's train left him at the little way-side station used by visitors to Altcar Court and few beside. He and the man in the signal-box had it all to themselves, and after a few minutes' talk with him he left his luggage to be sent for and started on a two-mile tramp homewards.

His road lay between tall hedgerows in riotous luxuriance of leaf and blossom, and rows of stately elms, till it reached a stile and a foot-path, the short cut across the fields to Altcar Court. Here Eustace stopped, and drew a long breath of relief as he stood charmed into idle lingering by all the sweet country sights and sounds around him. Then some fancy made him draw forth the letter he carried, to read it again here. It was addressed to him at St. Ermentrude's, and was at least brief and to the purpose.

"My dear Eustace.—Our old friend Lord Ingilby has just ridden over on an errand that has disturbed me much. The living of Altcar is as you know in his gift, and thinking it would gratify me to see you there, he has written, he says, to offer it to you. I am about to put your confidence and affection to a severe test—an unreasonable one I fear you may be tempted to think—unless you are prepared to trust my assurance that I am acting in your interests alone, as you will acknowledge one day. It would be a great pleasure to your mother and myself to have you near us, but think over our last conversation and you will understand how utterly unadvisable your residence here must be. As my eldest son, living at Altcar, you must, during my life, necessarily be looked upon as the future owner of the place; a false position which I particularly desire you to avoid; and after my death, however good the terms subsisting between you and Randolf, it would be most undesirable in my opinion to have the elder brother at the Rectory and the younger at the Court, a

contingency for which I have endeavoured to prepare your mind. Time presses, so I must add no more. Ever, my dear Eustace,

"Your affectionate father,

"ALTCAR."

That was what he read, there, under the soft green shadows, to the music of the scythe-clink of the mowers in the field beyond, the plash of the mill-stream and the delicate notes of the yellow-hammer, who was singing him a friendly little greeting from the hedge.

On the hill-side across the valley lay Altcar Court. A low red cluster of buildings, confessedly a farm-house in their earliest design, that looked as if they had increased and spread by the natural slow growth of years and not at the pleasure of man; now stretching out a wing, now lifting up a tower, widening here, crumbling there. A warm, many-hued, softly-tinted, unshapely, altogether lovely pile; ivy-wreathed, quaintly roofed, mellowed to a thousand beauteous tones of red, grey, amber and russet. It was overshadowed by oaks whose acorns had dropped in the soil of Plantagenet England, and overlooked rich acres of meadow land, where the kine browsed deep in the rich pasture, or the long swathes of new-cut grass lay scenting the air. A goodly heritage, never to be his.

He had not been born to it, nor yet his father.

Mr. Redgrave Stannard at the outset of his parliamentary career had considered his distance from the title so remote as to be beyond calculation, and the property had long ago been parted from it. Many years after, when the greater portion of the Altcar estates happened to be in the market, he found himself in a position to purchase them. He was a man of mark by that time, one on whom the leaders of his party were understood to look with appreciative eyes, as certain to form one of the next government.

He had lived his life till then, every day of it. It had run, as compared with other men's, as steam to a foot-pace and—so people said—reached its end by so much the sooner. At an age when most men are apt to think that the best half of their lives lies before them, he had quietly dropped his career and retired to Altcar Court to vegetate through his remaining years as a mere country gentleman.

Why he had done so was an open secret. Amongst the victims of a terrible railway disaster was beautiful, brilliant Mrs. Redgrave Stannard, who was brought home to her husband crushed and dying. All that human skill could do was done to hold the life in the poor shattered, disfigured body, and, to the wonder of all, with success; if success it were, to prison a bright human soul in a lifeless body, deprived of power of speech and almost of movement. That so much remained to him and to her sons Mr. Stannard gave daily, hourly thanks. Enough of her was left to him to love and serve, and to that he dedicated all his days to come.

One celebrated physician, who had been summoned to the Court

on Mrs. Stannard's account, had a short, serious conversation with her husband on his own.

"I must outlive her," Eustace's father had said. "And you must show me how. I cannot leave her, even to her sons' care. We Stannards are a proverbially long-lived race, but in my case there are certain symptoms," and he went into detail. Before the interview was over Mr. Redgrave Stannard had pledged himself to retire from public life, spend his days in the country and live by rule, as the price of a possible extra twenty years of existence, and felt well content that the bargain was possible.

It was an old story by this time. Time and custom had long ago done their healing work in the stricken household. His mother's state was past hope of amendment or fear of relapse. His father had put his past life away so determinedly that others perforce had done the same and looked on him only as an ordinary country squire with possibly unsound views on questions of agricultural interest, whims about scientific farming, and no pronounced political opinions.

Death had been busy during these years amongst the elder Stannards. Daughters had been born and fathers and sons had died, till, unlikely as it had seemed, the title followed the property, and while Eustace was yet at St. Ermentrude's his father became Lord Altcar. He remembered now with an amused smile the indignation he felt at the extra value to his teaching this fact seemed to give. It put the finishing touch to his disgust with society and impatience to escape from it.

Eustace leaped over his stile and walked briskly towards the Court, approaching it, not by the mile-long avenue, but by a path leading through a copse to a gate opening on a lawn; up and down which a broad-shouldered, grey-bearded old gentleman was dragging a roller, a youth in shirt sleeves standing respectfully by. The roller came to a stand within a few feet of Eustace and the operator stopped to lift his hat and to wipe his damp forehead.

"Now do you see what I mean, James? Slowly. Deliberately. Make its weight felt. *That's* the way to roll a lawn. Now don't let me see you cantering over it again."

James attached himself to the roller and marched off funereally; and Eustace advancing was greeted with a hearty: "Hillo! It's you. Glad to see you my boy," and a cordial hand-clasp.

"At work as usual?"

"Work? No, no. This is play. I was in the hay-field at five this morning. I've got a few experiments in ensilage going on, and must see the work done myself. There's no telling what games those fellows may be up to."

"How is my mother?"

"Just the same—or—I hardly dare to dwell upon it—but that Frenchman's treatment *has* done something for her. There is a slight increase of power in her hand. Mary Liddell always believed

she might be able to write with it yet. And a new nurse is coming."

Eustace tried hard to look sanguine, but failed. Every time that he saw his father some fresh hope had arisen, only to set like its predecessors in disappointment.

"When can I see her?"

"Come now, if you like. She has just gone in. We've been round the vineries. She's not satisfied with our new man. Too plausible by half. I'll never engage another without consulting her. Come on."

After the first surprise of seeing his son had passed off, Lord Altcar seemed to grow uneasy and impatient of the tête-à-tête, talking on fast and rather at random as he led the way to the house. "Come down for a breath of country air, I suppose? We've a flower and vegetable show on Tuesday and, if you're a judge of peas——"

"But I am not unfortunately; and I leave on Monday morning. I came down to be here with Randolf."

"Randolf! With *Randolf!*" Lord Altcar stopped short and looked full at his son, a touch of genuine consternation mixed with his astonishment. "What's bringing *him* down here?"

"He has been in England for some time I find. He brought his wife home before the little girl's birth. Naturally he wants to see you all."

Lord Altcar had removed his hat and was wiping his forehead. He gave an audible sound of relief. "A girl? Ha! No, we hadn't heard of it. I'm uncommonly glad it's no worse—no difficulties I mean." He said no more till they reached the house, and entering by a wide window opening on the terrace, found themselves in a spacious, lofty room, filled with colour, air and sunshine, or so it seemed—flowers, rich draperies, pictures, books—all that Altcar held of rare or beautiful collected there round its silent mistress.

She sat in a large chair near the window, her form concealed in a loose dress of soft, black, lustreless satin, a large mantilla of Spanish lace arranged about the head and shoulders and secured across the lower part of the face so as to conceal it, like the yashmak of an Eastern woman, leaving exposed a low line of white forehead and two great flashing black eyes. Wonderful eyes; quick, keen, eloquent, painfully expressive, proclaiming themselves too truly the one outlet of the imprisoned soul.

They had watched the two approach from the window, and shone with a soft gladness as they recognised Eustace. Mary Liddell, Lady Altcar's cousin and constant companion, arranging flowers at a table near, greeted Eustace demurely, and discreetly withdrew with her posies.

There was much to hear and tell on both sides; difficult as such a one-sided conversation might seem. Lady Altcar's eyes held her

son fast, as it were, noting and interpreting every tone, gesture and expression, he felt. She heard far more than the mere words that passed around her, sensitively awake as she was to each subtle change of mood or thought in her companions. "She sees me think," Mary Liddell said once.

Lord Altcar took a seat out of range of his wife's eyes and said little, though he listened with interest, once or twice interrupting rather abruptly Eustace thought.

"Well, dear, I never saw the grapes doing better. That Muscat house is a picture, eh?"

The dark eyes expressed assent.

"Why, I thought you didn't like him! No? You don't? Do you admit he can grow grapes? He can, eh?" as she made the almost indistinguishable sign with her head that expressed agreement.

"What then? Oh, I know. You think he can sell them too? That's it. Well I shall keep my eye on him. I never knew you wrong yet."

Something of questioning or distress in Lady Altcar's look as her eyes rested on her son, made her husband begin to fidget nervously to end the interview, and he carried Eustace off to the kitchen gardens to exhibit some new giant growths; then to the flower garden, beautiful and luxuriant, and tended with sedulous care. "All her idea," Lord Altcar said, proudly, now and then pointing out some change or improvement; and Eustace marvelled anew at the patience and sympathy that had lent themselves so successfully to the service of the unworded thought.

It was late when they returned to the house. Lord Altcar insisted on accompanying his son to his room to see if it were in proper order.

He fussed attentively about him, and then hurried away just in time to dress. He stopped at the doorway however.

"You didn't come here only for a holiday, or to announce Randolf's visit, eh?"

"No. On business of my own," was the rather dry reply.

"So I thought. After dinner, please; and mind, not a word before her."

Eustace knew the routine of the house, and descended to the dining-room, passing on his way through the long suite of splendid, empty, melancholy rooms, where no woman's voice was ever heard except Mary Liddell's little half-frightened murmurs. He found the dining-room as he expected, vacant, till at the stroke of seven a door at the end was flung open, admitting Lady Altcar's wheel chair, carefully guided by her husband to its place at the head of the table. A loose robe of grey velvet softly shrouded her figure, and her head and shoulders were veiled in clouds of filmy white lace, fastened in position by a sparkling diamond spray. The white fingers of one hand just appeared from out of the velvet drapery.

There were people who, when bidden to Altcar, affected to shudder

at the presence of this silent figure, this Death in Life in their midst, with its great glancing eyes and voiceless lips; but those who knew Lord Altcar well knew also what that silent presence was to him; how half the desolateness of his life was gone when he knew that his words fell upon her ears, and saw her eyes answering him in a language he could read.

It had been Mary Liddell who had first imagined the possibility of bringing her helpless charge from her invalid seclusion, and by gentle insistance carried her point, till Altcar Court lost much of its forlorn mistressless air, and life there drifted back somewhat into its old routine.

Good little Mary! She followed Lady Altcar in, dressed in her best black lace frock, in which in honour of Eustace she had ventured to pin a bunch of carnations, feeling recklessly coquettish as she did so. She had respectfully idolised the grave, handsome young clergyman for many a day, feeling it a great liberty to do so all the while.

He was glad of her assistance to-day in keeping the ball of conversation rolling. His thoughts, full of his errand, occasionally wandered away from Lord Altcar's good-humoured gossip, and her timid, anxiously-interested little questions bridged over many a gap of silence.

Dinner ended at last. The cloth was drawn, as Lord Altcar would have it, and the old, cut crystal decanters in their heavy silver casters, and the fruit in more cut crystal or Chelsea china placed on the dark mahogany, and then at a look from Lady Altcar, Mary rose and Lord Altcar wheeled the invalid chair away.

He came back in a few minutes, having assured himself that the little summer evening fire was crackling in the drawing-room grate, the chair at the proper angle for comfort, and Mary Liddell provided with something to read aloud that Lady Altcar was likely to care for.

"Now then, Eustace. Out with it," he remarked, bustling back to his seat and pouring out a glass of port.

"Do you remember the time you came up to see me in town, before I left St. Ermentrude's?" the Vicar began in a low voice, as if he disliked recalling the circumstance. "You had a good deal to say to me then about my future prospects."

Lord Altcar raised his glass to the light and regarded the wine critically, perhaps to avoid the necessity of meeting his son's eyes. "Yes, yes, I remember, of course I do. I don't quite recall what I said. Something about your income wasn't it? You see you had been getting through a tidy lot of money with your charities, and your tours in the East and Greece, and book and engraving collecting manias. I was afraid you see, my boy, that you might fancy that a title in prospect justified a little more spending, and I thought a word or two needful. What is it now? I don't want you to fancy I grudge you anything really reasonable. You always spent like a gentleman and had some-

thing to show for it. More than could be said of Randolf, that last, eh?"

"That was not quite all," replied Eustace, in some wonderment at his father's manner. "This letter followed in a day or two," and he handed it over to Lord Altcar.

"Quite so, quite so!" He glanced at it distastefully. "Yes, you understood me, I see. It was good of you, Eustace—upon my soul it was—to give in to me so handsomely. You'll see, some day, how it all comes about." He checked himself rather abruptly, and gave his forehead a perplexed rub. "Now what can I do for you? What have you come to say?"

"Do you remember a promise you made me give you then? No? I had been airing some of my views I suppose." He gave a little conscious laugh. "They were extreme in those days, I remember—I was six-and-twenty then, I am nearly thirty now—I was rather surprised to hear you approve of them." Lord Altcar set his glass down sharply and turned to look in his face. "You made me promise, you know, that if I ever changed and thought of marrying——"

"What!" shouted his father, making the glasses ring. "Is that what you have come to tell me? By Jove!" The last a long drawn exclamation of profoundest dismay.

Eustace leant back in his chair watching his father, who after draining his glass and setting it down again with perilous violence sprang up and commenced to pace the room in disquietude. "You never led me to calculate on this," he said, angrily.

"What is your objection?"

"Why—why, your views, you know; I thought *you* of all fellows would have been consistent. I counted on you, Eustace." Lord Altcar was evidently sorely perturbed.

"Tell me the truth, father," demanded Eustace, trying to speak steadily. "Don't be afraid to speak out broadly what you have been hinting at. You desire my place for Randolf. Do you wish that I should live unmarried to secure to him the title as well as the property."

Lord Altcar stopped suddenly; his thick white eyebrows knitted over his angry eyes, a startled look on his face.

"What! What are you daring to accuse me of?" he flamed forth. "This from you to me, Eustace!"

Eustace's heart gave a great joyful leap at his father's indignation, but he went on coldly in the very white heat of his emotion.

"What other inference could I draw? You have been specially careful to explain to me that the Altcar property was completely dissevered from the title, that I was not to calculate on my undisputed succession. You would do what you chose with it on your death, and take the consequences of the world considering you unjust and capricious. Then—I admit the remark was not intended for my hearing—you regretted that Randolf and I could not change places."

"Eustace! Forgive me," Lord Altcar broke in, holding out his

hand to his son. "What a fool, a cruel, inconsiderate fool I was to be sure! I was distracted myself at the time, and that's my only excuse. I told you the half-truth that is ever the blackest of lies. I wanted to settle your mind on the point of succession and to keep a secret at the same time. I didn't see how the case would appear to you. I thought—or I didn't think——"

"That the loss of my prospective inheritance would be so overwhelming as to swallow up all lesser grievances?" ended his son, not bitterly but with a kindly smile.

"Something of the sort," admitted his father. "I was possessed by a demon of 'illusion and confusion and evasion.' I was going to call myself the greatest fool in England just now, but I recollected your grandfather who was a bigger in his day, and whom we have to thank for the whole complication. Altcar is no more mine than yours, Eustace. It is Randolf's, every stick and stone of it," and Lord Altcar faced his son fair and square, his head up and his eyes frankly opened as he made this astonishing revelation.

"Altcar Randolf's! And he doesn't know it?"

"Nor ever shall in my time, please God," replied the old gentleman, with cheerful irreverence.

"Altcar Randolf's?" Eustace repeated in his amazement. "Then what is ours?"

"Nothing. Every penny belongs to him in strict justice. *Legally* he has not a vestige of a claim on anything."

"And I am never even to guess at the answer to the riddle? Very good." Eustace's voice took a shade of disapproval. "As it lies between you and him I am content to leave it so. No, I can't say content, but I have no right to demand that it should be otherwise. *Why* cannot Randolf be trusted as much as I am? A thoroughly good fellow with a heart and a conscience ——"

"And a wife," added his father with a deliberate snarl; "a wife with a heart and conscience of a size to correspond with her brains. There's not room enough in her for too much of any of them. I won't trust him. She'd screw the whole business out of him between two kisses, and come off here by the next train to install herself as mistress. You know she would."

It was extremely probable Eustace admitted.

"Randolf indeed! Randolf has £800 a year besides his pay, and gets through as much again. Give him £4,000 a year and he'll spend £10,000. Perhaps you'd like to see Altcar mortgaged up to the chimney-pots and your mother and me living on an allowance in some cheap neighbourhood? I shall not do it."

"Do you think right and justice are dear to no one but yourself?" went on the old lord more animatedly. "Don't you imagine how strong the reason must be—the very strongest reason of all with me—that has restrained me from putting an end to our false position at once. For your mother's sake, Eustace, for hers only. I am doing

no actual wrong, but if I were—if I were, I say, and it was to save her a moment's trouble—I'd break every commandment in the Decalogue and take the consequences!"

Lord Altcar's descending fist set glass and china ringing. He flung a chair which stood in his way aside violently and walked to the window, where he stood tossing the grey locks off his forehead, his lips working, his nostrils quivering.

Eustace looked at him half-amused, half-sad for a while, then gently persistent began, "It is only the question of right or wrong ——"

"Only!" sneered his father. "And it is always so easy to tell which is which, is it not?" He came and stood by his son presently, and softly laid his hand upon his shoulder. "Don't think more hardly of me than you need, Eustace," he said, in a gentler, more natural tone. "If I were to tell you the story, you would see——" he broke off short again. "Your mother is expecting us. As to your affair, we'd nearly forgotten that, had we not? Wait, give me time, and trust me a little. Now, will you take some more claret? No. Then shall we go into the drawing-room? I hear Mary Liddell singing."

And they followed the music to where in her sweet little thread of a voice Mary was declaring that, alas, she ——

"Scarce can go or creep
While Lubin is away!"

CHAPTER XXI.

EUSTACE'S BIRTHRIGHT.

Randolf Stannard arrived in due course, to the delight of Altcar generally. He was exuberantly joyous at being at home once more, perhaps relieved by the Sunday postal arrangements which cut him off from his Amy's behests and the remembrance of her sufferings for a space. At any rate he behaved like a schoolboy broken loose, while his father regarded him with expressively lifted eyebrows now and then, and Eustace rejoiced privately that after all he had not taken upon himself to answer for his brother's reticence or discretion. He always seemed comically in awe of his father, and kept by his mother or Eustace for the most part, even going the length of accompanying the latter to church twice to a protracted, unadorned country service.

Altcar Church is a huge, rambling structure, light and lofty, with beautiful Norman arches carefully clothed in yellow distemper, and mouldings deep buried in plaster. The rows of oaken benches down the nave had been carefully painted and grained, and the flat ceiling that had been erected many a year ago as a temporary substitute for the groined roof of the "Altcar aisle" was papered in oak with a tasty "Gothic bordering" to match. The family possessed a neat little enclosure with open-work panels, like an ecclesiastical meat-safe,

into which they shut themselves under the hatchment of the last of the Torkingtons, the family who for a generation or two had deposed the Stannards of Altcar.

Eustace knew and loved it all. He remembered nearly every fresh country face in the long rows. The prosperous-looking farmers with their smart daughters and buxom wives, the decent old goodies in their Sunday crape, and the old, old men who were old, old men when he first knew them, and who, nor yet their coats, seemed not to have grown one whit the older in all those years. The clattering little troop of chubby-faced, tow-headed boys and demure, conscious little girls came streaming into the Chancel seats as of yore and vociferated the petition "Anincli now Rarts to keep this law" with the same jovial unintelligibility.

The Rector, an old College chum, by no means shared his sentiments. He dined at the Court that day and poured his confidences into Eustace's friendly ear as they walked on the terrace afterwards.

"You've got the best of it, Stannard, if you only knew it. I'm a town bird myself—every feather, and I envy you. I'm doing no good here, the round man in a square hole. You would shoot, and farm the glebe, and fish, and talk knowingly about crops and game and patent manures, and combine the authority of Squire and Parson."

"Why don't you exchange into a town living, then?" interrupted his friend, hastily. The Rector gave a little conscious laugh.

"Perhaps I shall some day—when I can persuade someone to go with me. There is a powerful reason for my staying here just now."

Eustace followed his significant glance to where Mary Liddell was bending over his mother's chair. "What, you mean Mary?" he asked, with rather a dismayed accent.

"I know what you would say," Mr. Renwick went on hastily. "And even if she would ever consent to leave your mother I could hardly press her to do so at present. She has given me a final answer more than once. I won't take it, you know, and I hope by staying here and keeping the subject open I may induce her to change her mind by the time comes when she has to find another home."

"That won't be in my father's time or mine."

"I don't know. I did hope that something might be arranged. This is *your* proper place and your wife's or—even if you didn't marry, perhaps your brother's wife might come to Altcar. Mary would always feel that a daughter had the best right to her place. I must trust to time and chance," sighed the grey-haired, faithful lover wistfully, wondering at his friend's want of sympathy.

Followed a long evening of sauntering in and out between the softly-lighted drawing-room and the warm, flower-scented, dew-gleaming lawns; listening to Mary's delicate, old-fashioned music of "the pig-tail school," Gluck and Haydn, Mozart and Pacini, till the

Rector took up his post beside the piano and Mary's fingers began to stray idly over the keys. The father and sons talked softly round Lady Altcar's chair, her lovely dark eyes resting caressingly on each face in turn, or drooping their white lids as in plenitude of happiness. Mary fluttered up at last full of exclamations at the lateness of the hour and bore her away, and the party dispersed.

Randolf started off to walk home and have a smoke with Mr. Renwick, Eustace stood hesitating, looking at his father who was minutely comparing his watch with the drawing-room clock.

"What time did you say you must start to-morrow morning?"

"Six o'clock, to walk to the station."

"Very good. I'll go with you. I shall be glad of your views on a point or two of business after a night's reflection. Can you spare me an hour? Come to the library."

Eustace followed his father into the dim, splendid old room lighted only by a green-shaded lamp on the writing-table. Lord Altcar fidgeted uneasily about for a second or two, turning the lamp up and down. "Sit down," he said at last, taking his place at the table. "I've a long story to tell. You know too much and too little, Eustace. Enough to make you form a harsh opinion of my conduct, and not enough for my justification." He had got his son's face into the range of the lamp-light and glanced sharply at it as he spoke. "I've been a fool as I admitted before, but not a rogue, Eustace."

Eustace only replied by a look, but that seemed sufficient for his father, who went on more easily. "Tell me what you remember about your grandfather Corbett?"

"I seem to recall a good deal of family disturbance whenever he came, somehow. I don't know in the least what it was all about. I used to be alternately in favour and disgrace, I think, for I always associate him either with tips of sovereigns or dry bread and water for dinner whenever I hear his name."

Lord Altcar laughed. "That's the man. We all went up and down in his good graces in much the same fashion. The one idea of his life was to see his daughter Lady Altcar before he died. My place in his affections rose and fell with my prospects. He quarrelled with us all for a year when my great-uncle Anthony—the heir presumptive—married; and forgave us handsomely all round when Mrs. Anthony ran away with a courier." Lord Altcar laughed again, but exasperatedly. "I put up with a good deal from him from first to last. Fortunately I was rich enough to be independent of him, but —Esmée being his only child— we couldn't altogether cut ourselves adrift from him, poor, lonely, crochetty old fellow! Uncle Anthony died childless, so did his younger brother. Two cousins were killed mountaineering, and it really became almost possible to count on my chance of the succession. Those must have been the days of the sovereign tips, I imagine."

"No. He gave me a pony. I remember it quite well."

"Yes, that was the time. He even began to congratulate himself on your being called Eustace—the family name—instead of Randolf, after him, as he at first demanded. Just then the Altcar estate came into the market, and nothing would serve him but that I must buy it. Lord Altcar would not. His wife had only brought him daughters and was likely to outlive him. So in an unlucky moment I consented. The property went for a song—to the tune of £90,000 that is—and your grandfather advanced the purchase money. I was an idiot to put myself in his power, I know, but I never was a man of business. My father had invested his money shrewdly and I received the income and asked no questions; money difficulties were something quite beyond my ken. My mind was full of an impending political crisis, and I let your grandfather have his way for the sake of peace and quiet. However, all went well for a long time after."

"I remember our all coming down here together, and how delighted my mother was. Grandfather gave me a gun, didn't he? I know he promised me a hunter, but I never got it."

"I should think not. That was the year of Lady Altcar's death. Six weeks after Lord Altcar married his daughter's governess, and within the year came a son and heir. Poor old Corbett, I don't think he ever quite rallied from that shock. He wrote furiously, desiring us never to come near him again, and demanding the repayment of his money. That wasn't so easy. I had sunk all my spare capital in repairs and improvements, the expenses of the two establishments had been heavy, and when I came to look into some of my father's investments I found them considerably depreciated in value since his day. I couldn't even resell the place just then except at a ruinous loss. I was just at my wits' end, when I saw in the paper the death of my poor little cousin—the baby heir—of croup. Almost immediately followed a conciliatory letter from your grandfather full of a new scheme. If I would consent he would take Altcar off my hands and settle it on Randolf, who should take the name of Corbett on his wedding-day and found a family. He would get a deed drawn up to that effect as soon as possible. Poor old fellow, that was the last I ever heard from him."

Lord Altcar broke short off, and laid his forehead on his hand.

"Was the deed ever executed?" Eustace asked.

"I don't know. I never thought more of it. I had just answered the letter when the messenger came in with the news—you know—your mother—*dead* they told me. I had no thought or care for anything else after that." His ruddy face grew white and his voice shook at the bare recollection.

"How long did it all last, Eustace, that terrible time? I never seem able to realise it. So much happened that is missing from my recollection. You went to Oxford, Randolf was at Sandhurst, and sometime in those terrible months—or years were they?—your grandfather died in America. He had gone to look after some Californian

mines in which he was interested, and was buried at San Francisco. He left everything to Esmée by a will dated many years back, and I never cared to make further inquiries after the deed, supposing that it was destroyed when he heard of Lord Altcar's death following his child's. Some years after I accidentally came upon a letter addressed to me, but never sent, and its enclosure."

Eustace's breath came faster as he watched his father unlock a despatch box which stood near him and take out an envelope.

"Read it for yourself, and say whether it is binding on you and me or not."

There was a long silence in the room, broken only by the rustling of the sheets as Eustace turned them over. "I think we have no choice in the matter," he pronounced at last, slowly and decidedly. "Altcar or its purchase money should have been Randolf's on his wedding-day."

"I took the papers—just as you see them—to a lawyer," Lord Altcar said, "and he laughed at me for fancying myself bound by such a document, not even signed or witnessed. But I'm clear in my mind, and so I see are you, that the old man considered it binding and believed we should think so."

Eustace sighed perplexedly. "Altcar or the purchase money to be invested in an estate of equal value for Randolf; that is how I understand it," he said, consideringly.

"There's the sting of the whole business," groaned his father. "I might have repaid it but for my own hot-headed folly. I got chafed and impatient of his incessant reminders of our obligations to him, tried a short-cut to wealth in the shape of some promising speculations, burnt my fingers, lost my head, threw good money after bad, and escaped utter ruin by something not very short of a miracle. Say the hardest things you can to me, Eustace, I'll admit their justice." He was walking up and down the room distractedly now, his son's eyes following him sadly and kindly. "What am I to do?" he said at last, coming to a standstill in front of him. "Where are we to go if we give up Altcar? How am I to save up £90,000 in my lifetime? Do you know what Randolf and his wife are living at the rate of? Nearly a year's income from Altcar has twice gone to pay his debts. What is left to *us*, do you suppose? Your mother's dowry and my savings from the wreck. That is all. Think of your mother, Eustace, and think of what her happiness is to me, and tell me what there is left to me but to keep silence till I die."

"If you are still resolved against trusting Randolf ——"

"How can I? What dependence can we place on him? The whole world would know the story to-morrow; or he'd go about thinking of the secret he'd got to keep till his mind got so full of it that he couldn't open his lips without blurting out something fatal. Why your mother would read it all in his face the first time she saw you two together!"

"Then there is no alternative," Eustace admitted, reluctantly.

"You are not thinking of your own deprivation, eh? You bear me no grudge for that? No, that's not your way. It will come hard on you, my boy. I wish I could have done more. I have had friends who might have helped me, offers of good appointments—but you know what Sir Henry said—I must take care of my life for her sake. I'm good for another thirty years yet, I feel certain, but only so long as I live like a cabbage in the fields here."

Eustace turned his face more affectionately to his father than he had done yet: "Keep us out of title and property as long as you can, father. We are both agreed on that. Now shall I stow away these papers?"

"Yes, you may. But we've not done for the night yet. What about your marriage? Your mother will expect me to tell her all about it. Who's the lady?"

"My mother? What does she know about it?"

"Doesn't she know everything? Do you suppose Mary Liddell dare suppress a line of a letter or a paragraph in a newspaper, or that I can see her eyes questioning mine and refuse to answer them? I suppose, though, I'm pretty good at deceiving her now and then, my poor, helpless darling!"

"My marriage? I wish I could speak of it as a certainty. What you have told me to-night seems to have put it farther away from me than ever. I would rather not talk more about it just now. I suppose I may take your consent for granted now? Good-night."

"I shall walk with you to the station to-morrow," were Lord Altcar's last words as they parted.

"The morn was dew-pearled" as when Pippa passed, and thick-hung with floating gossamer threads to boot. Eustace and his father walking through the long sparkling meadow-grass to the stile stopped for the former to wave a farewell to the close-shuttered windows of the Court.

"Ah, Eustace lad, it's you I'd like to think of there when I am gone," sighed Lord Altcar, trudging sturdily along the road beside him. "You love the place as well as I do, and would do your duty by it; while Randolf——Well, there, right's right, and I'll say no more, but the pity of it!"

"Right's right," echoed Eustace, discouragingly.

"There's one chance left for us, Eustace," went on the old lord eagerly. "Your future wife—you have told me nothing about her yet. I hope for your sake she's rich—perhaps rich enough to be able to join in some arrangement."

"You mean does she possess the sum of £100,000; and would she be willing to refund the Altcar purchase money to Randolf and take the property, plus Eustace Stannard?"

"Don't put it in that way; though mind you—she might make a

much worse investment. You'll only fidget yourself into a state of morbid touchiness if you persist in regarding it in that light. What can a woman do better with her money than buy a home like Altcar and a good husband with it; and a title thrown in eventually? The nonsense people talk! What the deuce do the conceited minxes imagine would induce any man to afflict himself for life with their company if he is to get nothing by it?"

"Was that your view when you married?"

Lord Altcar stopped short and stared, then gave a laugh. "Your mother was one of a thousand, Eustace. My remarks refer to the nine hundred and ninety-nine to whom your choice is unhappily limited. Find a pearl like my Esmée and let money and lands go to the winds if they stand between you, say I!"

Eustace nodded approvingly, and the signal-box came in sight at the turn of the road.

"I suppose, though, you are quite certain that you have found her?" demanded Lord Altcar with a sharp side-look.

"Quite as certain as that I must lose her again," was the grave, sad answer. "I think we need not consider your last alternative farther. The lady I hoped to make my wife is a rich woman, who must not be entrapped by fraud into marrying a pauper. She is essentially a woman of the world; beautiful and bright and admired wherever she goes, and I should have to ask her to share an obscure hardworking life that nothing but love for me and the work could render tolerable. She is herself the soul of truth and honour, and I should have to let her discover that I am more or less of an impostor. There are my reasons; so there it must end," and Eustace walked hastily on, while Lord Altcar shook his grey head and struck the ground with his stick once or twice impatiently.

"We must get Randolf to call his little one Esmée, after the mother," said Eustace, rapidly, a little at random. "It will be good to see a small Esmée running about the place. How Mary Liddell will exult in her!"

Lord Altcar was gazing down the level stretch of line on which a toy train seemed to stand motionless with a white fluff suspended in the air above. There was time for a last appeal. "I've been doing you greater mischief than I thought," he said, sorrowfully. "Do as you like about keeping my secret. I've blundered too obstinately to have the right to exact any forbearance. Go and tell her what you like. Go at once. Put the case to her, I can trust you to spare me as much as possible. Give her the chance of showing she's wise enough to know a man worth loving when she sees him, peer or pauper, or both at once."

The train was rapidly expanding with a growing rush and roar that slackened in obedience to the signals. Eustace clasped his father's hand silently and turned away.

"Good-bye, my boy, good-bye! Found her and lost her, eh! Well

for him if no other fellow has picked her up in the meantime. Esmée said it was a woman he had on his mind ever so long ago and she's bound to be right."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WITCH'S BREW.

BACK again in St. Fridolin's in the old familiar study, Eustace seemed to have left himself and his concerns far away under the Altcar oaks and returned to existence as the Vicar of St. Fridolin's only. He had left something else behind as well, a load of doubt, of suspicion and discontent that had been his unconscious companion ever since he had begun to notice the relative positions which he and his brother held under his father's roof.

He was in a trying, anomalous position himself still, but he knew the worst, and with certainty, and there still remained the glorious possibilities of the future. A merry, reckless little crowd of fancies had sprung into life with his father's last words, and had been playing their will-o'-the-wisp gambols through his well-regulated mind all the way down. They tempted him to all manner of absurdities, to a foolish loitering in the churchyard on the spot where he and she had stood and watched the building of the room together in the early spring before the poplar leaves were green ; to a wistful fancy that the red-rose leaves trodden underfoot in his study still scented the air ; to a tender touch of the deal table where her pretty gloved hand had once rested, till he sternly bade the whole pack of them begone, and shut the study door on them.

He set to his work with right good-will, steadily and systematically, till the last question was answered and the last visitor disposed of, and then, admitted them again while he commenced a note to Mrs. Damien asking her to spare him a few minutes that afternoon.

Before the date was written, the door opened with an impetuous jerk, and de Cressy precipitated himself in upon his Vicar, his face full of importance and mystery.

"Are you engaged just now?" he began without preliminary. "I want you to come with me. You know Lady Valeria Meynell? She wants you at once."

Eustace caught up his hat and followed his curate to the hansom in waiting, reserving all questions till they were off. "Is she ill," he asked.

"*I* should say so, but they won't see it. I've been there a good deal, lately, since the Brants came, and Constance and Oliver seem to be everlastingly on the premises too. I fancy they're uncommonly jealous of the Brants. This morning was the first time I ever found her alone, even the maid away, and very bad she looked. 'I want Mr. Stannard!' she said to me; 'go and fetch him before they know you

have been here. Tell him to come at once.' So I came. Queer, isn't it? Only yesterday Constance asked me if you were out of town, and looked so delighted when I said 'yes' that I thought I wouldn't spoil it by saying you were coming back again."

De Cressy had possessed himself of a latch-key, and admitted the Vicar unobserved when they arrived in Seagrave Place. The house was very still and the drawing-room empty. De Cressy ran lightly up-stairs to the sitting-room where Eustace and Meynell had searched in vain that night for the missing mistress, and returned with an imperative summons: "You are to go up alone," and Eustace obeyed.

Lady Valeria lay on the couch near the window, her wraps and cushions tossed about in disorder as if she had been restlessly moving up and down. Near her was the table with her desk, books and bible, just as Eustace remembered them. She beckoned him to approach without a word and pointed to a chair beside her. "I have behaved badly to you. I thought I had found other help and better, but you were right after all."

"What has happened since we met?" he asked her kindly. "You have been ill I hear."

"My heart is broken." The words dropped from her lips one by one deliberately, heavy, leaden, sad, and her head sank back on her cushion.

"I am too old!" she broke out presently. "Too old to begin it all over again. The weary work, waiting, searching, following false hopes, catching brief glimpses of light. I have seen him. Remember that! He *is* alive, and my own son; the son I dreamed of."

"When did you see him, and how did you recognise him?"

"Never mind that now. I have lost him again. I have been put off and put off. He has gone away for a time. He has not received my messages. Perhaps he does not believe them. Perhaps you were right and he would rather live out his days nameless than own me—his mother."

Her great wild eyes full of agony sought his face questioningly, demanding comfort. He had none to give. "Let me help you again, if I can. Where can I find him?"

She shook her head hopelessly.

"Who brought you to him?"

"I may not tell you. One who will still help me, I believe—but the time is so short, so short, I cannot wait!"

"Do you mean Madame Euphrosyne Girard?"

She looked at him with a blank face. "Do you know her?"

A confidence was trembling on her lips, when from behind came a cold, soft voice. "Are you not going to drive after all, Mamma? The carriage is waiting, and I have been here for some time? I beg your pardon, Mr. Stannard, I don't wish to hurry you away, but in my mother's state of health we are obliged to consider her doctor's orders before everything. I know you will excuse it."

"Good-bye, Lady Valeria." He held her hand for one last instant. "Remember I am always at your service whenever you need me. And remember," he went on, casting about for some form of warning, "remember how your known generosity may lay you open to imposition. Promise me to examine well any claims that may be made upon you, and *trust no agent;* examine for yourself, or allow me to do so for you."

"Lady Valeria has her son or myself always at hand," interposed Mrs. Oliver, stiffly, and he perforce withdrew.

Lionel de Cressy made a wry face as they walked away. "I've got myself into disgrace there now! Poor dear Connie's face when she found you were with her mother! She and Oliver are simply ridiculous with their jealousy of us all. Mabel can't stand it, and she means to get her mother away without consulting them. Do you know Folkestone? I've promised to go to a house-agent's and engage rooms there at once."

Eustace did not accord the common civility of a reply. He was wondering what remained for him to do, if, indeed, any further interference with Lady Valeria's concerns was permissible. He might leave her, he thought, in her children's hands. If there was any imposture going on, the unknown son, at least, did not seem to be a party to it.

"It was a melancholy business, I can tell you," de Cressy was saying, when next Eustace heard him, his discourse having wandered back to St. Fridolin's and its politics. "The girls flooded the spot with their tears. They were promised a course of lectures on art, hygiene, and domestic economy, and that didn't seem to comfort them. Then Mrs. Damien asked them to plan some grand diversion for the next Bank Holiday, and Miss Archdale should carry it out, and that didn't do any good."

"Mrs. Damien?" and a sudden flood of consciousness rushed over him, sweeping Lady Valeria and her concerns clean out of his mind, and filling him full of the excitement of the living, actual present, and the coming hour on which the joy or sorrow of his life to come was depending. "I shall see her this afternoon."

"Ah, I didn't tell her so. She didn't seem to expect it. We've all seen the last of Mrs. Damien, I'm thinking," and the Curate heaved a tragi-comic sigh. "I've felt it coming for months past. There was something more than mere coincidence in the way two people I could name used to be seen at the same houses night after night. He's a fine fellow, the Professor. Well, here's luck to them—though he's got more than his fair share of that same, anyhow."

"Do you mean that Professor Montrose and Mrs. Damien are engaged?" asked Eustace, in the driest, most matter-of-fact tone, though his head seemed to grow dizzy with a sudden rush of recollections, Hester's confidences foremost amongst them.

"You've heard it, then! And I thought it was news I was telling

you. Sure, I only heard it myself yesterday, and Lady Beatrix swore me to secrecy till they were all off and away."

"Then I think we had better observe her injunction. No, I shall not try to see her. It would be no good, and I am wanted this afternoon elsewhere."

He turned sharp round with an abrupt farewell and disappeared leaving de Cressy to soliloquise with a wise little shake of his head.

"Now see that! And after the good friend she's been to him not to take a rap of interest in what becomes of her! It's buried alive in his smoky old parish, he is, body and soul!"

"Your Vicar's holiday has not done much for him," observed Mrs. Beltran, regarding him from the shelter of her half-closed shutter. "Don't stir! He is going away. What does he want with you?"

"Perhaps he had something to say about father," answered Elsie, stirring uneasily amongst her cushions, half relieved, nevertheless, at escaping the interview.

She had found her way back to Mrs. Beltran's room after all. A fine flush of heroism had warmed her heart and strengthened her determination that her last visit there should be final She distrusted her strange friend and the gifts she brought, and turned her back on both resolutely. Mrs. Beltran seemed nowise affronted. Her greeting was as kindly when next they met as before. She made no advances beyond a careless smile and word in passing, with a half-amused glance that made Elsie feel herself rather ridiculous as well as very forlorn and unhappy. Mrs. Damien was out of reach now, and she had offended Miss Archdale; and worst of all, her newly gained strength and vigour seemed to be daily lessening, just as she had learned their worth. No wonder the poor child at the first word of encouragement came meekly back to her allegiance before many of the long, lonely days were over.

The distorted little image on the wall seemed to leer down on her with a grotesque triumph when she re-entered the room. Zombi opened one green eye and purred, but Mrs. Beltran kept her exultation, if she felt any, to herself, talked only of Elsie's health, asked after Sampson, and read his letters with interest, and never mentioned Edric Poynter's name from first to last. Elsie lying on the shabby couch in a delicious interval of ease from pain felt cut to the heart with remorseful recollections of her ungracious doubts.

"I believe I shall get well now!" she exclaimed. "I feel so strong, so active, so wishful to stand and run about. I never did so before."

"You must not try yet," said Mrs. Beltran, with a secret laugh, as she rose from where she had been kneeling beside the couch. "Not for a few more days." But remember, till you are quite well and strong you are to breathe no word of this to anyone. I will cure you freely, but that is all I ask in return. Once let the charm be known to more than two and its worth is gone."

"Charms? There are no such things now-a-days," said Elsie, incredulously.

"Are there not? There were plenty to be had where I came from—in the West Indies—only you must go to the right place for them. My great-aunt Aurora knew all about that. She was the oldest negress on the Bel Espoir plantation. Everyone, from Monsieur de la Chétardie down to the last born piccanini, would shiver if Aurora lifted her finger. She was—listen," and Mrs. Beltran breathed one word in Elsie's ear.

"Obi!" repeated Elsie out loud, quite unimpressed. "What's that?"

Mrs. Beltran's face darkened. "Go and ask that old black woman I see you speaking to sometimes. See how her great eyes will roll and her knees shake at the word. You need not be frightened of me. I am nothing. Aurora taught me to read stars, and a few of her medicines, that is all. But she! She knew spells that would make a dead man's bones turn in his coffin. She could make a Gri-gri, a fever fetich that would keep the ship in whose hold it was hidden tossing idly day after day under the scorching sun, till the crew, to the last man, dropped plague-smitten, one by one. She knew magic words that you might write on an egg-shell and then set it full of dew in the sun to dry up your enemy's life as the moisture ascended. She could charm the rain from the sky, and turn the winds as she chose with her fan of magic feathers."

Elsie listened horrified, yet greedy for more. Mrs. Beltran dropped into her chair smiling to herself. She tossed back the masses of her dense black hair, and flung her round dusky arms above her head. She wore her favourite red gown, and the wide sleeves fell back, showing a bracelet made of a chain of shining black and red berries with a large embossed gold bead here and there. It slid from her wrist up her arm to her elbow, and then into the sleeve. Seeing Elsie's eyes following it, she slipped it off and tossed it to her.

"Look at that. It belonged to my young Mademoiselle Eva. It was a rosary, only the crucifix has gone somehow."

"From the West Indies?" Elsie asked, curiously examining it.

Mrs. Beltran nodded. "Aurora made her throw it away before she would do anything for her, and I picked it up and kept it for a remembrance. My beautiful young lady! Not a soul at Bel Espoir but was ready to fall down and worship her—except the one she wanted." And Mrs. Beltran sighed meaningly.

Elsie cast down her eyes and played with the rosary beads, and there was a space of silence. "How did it end?" she asked tremulously at length.

"She got her will and married him. What more would you have?"

"Do you mean to tell me that anything can change a man's feelings—can make him love against his will?"

"I never said that anything could. I said that Aurora could—and did."

"And you want to make me believe that you are as wise as Aurora, and can help me if you choose. I would not let you. I would not take love that another might be cheated out of."

"But if there was no one else? If his eyes were blind and his heart asleep, and if I could wake it and make him see his love in you?"

Elsie shrank from her scared, then suddenly wavered dizzily and dropped back on the sofa. Mrs. Beltran no whit dismayed, flung the window open and sprinkled her face with water, looking at her calmly and critically as she did so.

"It's a case for a clever surgeon," she said to herself. "I will tell the old fool of a father some day and let him get her cured. Not yet though. Not till I have done with her."

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWICE WARNED!

THE rare June sunshine was blazing down upon Shorncliffe. Along the white road approached a thick cloud of grey chalk-dust, veiling a hot little party returning from the ranges, whose faces shone, whose shoulders were powdered thickly, whose boots were white. Private Sampson Paramount trudged along cheerily amidst them from his first day's shooting. His nose was skinned, his eyes, between sun and mirage, felt ready to drop from his head, and he hated, how he hated every individual pebble in the cruel, scorching, bruising shingle with a separate and distinct hatred; yet in his heart there was great joy.

He had got through his drills last week, his shooting had been the best in his section, and his colour-sergeant, though not given to compliment, had vouchsafed a brief "You'll do for Egypt," that looked as if his glorious visions of active service might not be so far beyond hope of realisation as they had seemed to the recruit of a fortnight ago.

So Sampson marched along gaily, and the little red party became as a dark spot on the face of the winding white ribbon of a road that curls round the face of the green hill-side, and disappeared in the heights aloft.

His Instructor, meanwhile, was taking things more easily; lounging in the stern of a boat on the canal, smoking a gentle cigarette, and watching the low green banks on either side glide smoothly past. The Royal Denbigh had not yet received its orders for Egypt, though the premonitory stir and flutter of coming change might be felt throughout the regiment. There was much discussion of outfit. Boots maintained the lead as the subject of most interest, though pressed hard by pocket-filters and revolvers; and the more enthu-

siastic warriors had already had their swords, hitherto consecrated to toast-making and magazine cutting, sharpened to the armourer's utmost capability.

Edric Poynter hurried to his hut to get into mufti and rid himself of the morning's toil-stains. A number of letters by the second post awaited him, and while he changed he glanced at them carelessly as pretty well informed already of their contents. The great square thin one on the top was a card for the Militia dinner. Three of divers tints with familiar devices and the Folkestone post-mark meant tennis, afternoon tea, or dancing. No hurry about any one of them. He leisurely finished his dressing and dropping into his easy chair proceeded to open and chuck into his waste-paper basket recommendations of saddlery, pale ale, patent medicines, and, of course, boots, pocket filters, and revolvers. No second glance was needed at them. Two or three only remained to be opened, when he started up, showering the remaining handful on the ground, and held at arm's length, at the tips of his fingers as though it burnt him, a long, narrow, grey envelope. He knew it!

He knew the small, cramped foreign hand though he had never set eyes on it before. "To the Lieutenant Edric Poynter." The sickly, dead-sweet perfume it exhaled was the same that had clung about him for days, though the yellow Japanese handkerchief had come to a fiery end in a road-mender's brazier outside Privett's Hotel. He would willingly burn this too, and unread. But he dared not. "I thought I wasn't afraid of her, but I daren't risk that somehow," he said to himself, and with impatient disgust he broke open the envelope and drew forth the enclosure. Only four lines and unsigned.

"Take this warning and go. Anywhere. The further the better. There is danger hanging over you. Go, and let it pass. You know best whether to believe me or not. Go. For seven days and nights. E."

Edric dropped into his chair again with a chill feeling clutching at his heart. He was as brave as most men, and the threat of personal danger would have troubled him little. It was the notion that this woman with her odd knowledge of his life and thoughts was using him in some way for her own purposes, but how? How? He sprang up restlessly and paced his tiny room, two strides either way.

"I won't be dictated to by her," he declared, energetically. "Danger? What does she mean by it? Is she going to stow an infernal machine under my bed some night, or get me shot by accident on the ranges? Perhaps she's been at her star-reading again and sees a day of ill-luck coming for me. She was right before. I musn't forget *that*. Oh, confound her!" Each reflection occupied one turn, including a halt at the window to stare blankly across at the window of the next hut and turn again. "She promised me some mischief too. But that was in case I talked or asked injudicious questions. Well, I haven't

done either one or the other. Worse luck. I believe Miss Hester could have told me what to think of it if I'd told her the whole story. Wish she were here now. She'd see through it. Better than the best lawyer that ever wore a wig. Don't want to pull her into the mess though. 'Go. Anywhere.' That means she wants to get me out of Shorncliffe, and is prepared to make it unpleasant for me if I stay. Let her do her worst. If this secret society and moonlight sort of game is to continue, life won't be worth having. I prefer the dynamite. *I shall stay.*"

He picked up the note and tore it carefully into little bits, lit a match and burnt them on his fire shovel, threw the ashes out of the window and then washed his hands vigorously till the last trace of the faint, sickly-sweet scent had left them, over and over again as if to clear them of all contamination. Next he unlocked an envelope case on his table, in the foremost compartment of which was stuck a note as promising in its appearance as the other had been repulsive. A thick, square envelope directed in an upright, decided hand, very characteristic, he thought, of the capable, slim, strong fingers that penned it.

Only one sheet of paper inside and only three sides of that covered, but it bore much meaning if few words, and Edric seemed to hear Hester's pretty incisive speech in every sentence.

"Sincerely yours, Hester Archdale." "How uncommonly like her it looks, somehow," he soliloquised. "Distinct and downright and original." Some dozens of young ladies had subscribed themselves "his" with equal sincerity, but this was the first time he had ever detected an originality in the proceeding.

"So she was glad to receive my letter, which she found thrillingly interesting. Is that chaff, now? Whenever I begin to write or tell a story all the interest and thrill get left out somehow. Still, she's the sort of person who always knows what I *mean* to say.—So she goes on: 'It seemed at first as if your unpleasant acquaintances were getting up a case against Mr. Monk, but had secured the wrong man as a witness,' just what I thought myself, 'only you say that you could not help feeling that it was you, and you only that the woman was intent upon the whole time.' So she returns to her first opinion, slightly modified, that whatever the preliminaries the end will prove the same, extortion, and that Madame Euphrosyne gave me some sound advice with no intention of its ever being followed when she bid me hold my tongue and keep clear of her for the future. Ah, I put that very mildly. In fact I toned down all the ugly points. I may count on her undiminished interest if the romance is 'to be continued,' but for my sake she hopes we have arrived at the conclusion. No such luck! There's more to follow, and the only question is whether it will do her any good to hear of it. Better not, perhaps."

He replaced the note carefully, gave a last glance at the looking-glass, and sallied forth in search of luncheon and society.

He was provoked to find how little appetite he had for either.

He felt it an effort to attend to the passing remarks of the few men he found in the mess-room, answered at random, and when Carroll offered to drive him over to the Longfields' tennis next day, he couldn't remember whether he had been invited or not. He was equally vague when some other engagements fell under discussion, till he suddenly remembered that he had left most of his correspondence unopened on his table.

"I can't stand this!" he said, unconsciously, thinking aloud as he left the mess.

"Can't stand what?" asked Doudney, entering.

"Eh? did I say anything? I meant that horrible musk of Dalyell's. He has let it grow till the place smells like a snuff-shop."

Dalyell, whose special pride was the small glass shed outside, where the band played, and the Royal Denbigh sat and smoked after dinner amongst the flower-pots, made an indignant retort in defence of his golden cushions of blossom, but Edric neither heard nor apologised. He was striding straight to the Colonel's quarters, determined to settle the point of his going or staying once for all.

"Leave? Just now?" and the Colonel raised his grizzled eyebrows; "I'm very sorry, but it's quite out of the question; a week, did you say?"

"I don't suppose less would be any good."

"Then you certainly can't have it." Colonel Borrodale was polite and regretful, but he looked as if Edric ought to have known as much without asking.

"That's decisive at any rate," thought Edric, much relieved, "and now my mind's at rest." And he went off gaily to accept Carroll's offer, and to appease Dalyell's hurt feeling by offering to smoke a pet geranium for him, till the last green insect intruder died of disgust.

Nothing occurred to make him repent his temerity. He felt at first a certain sense of relief each day when the post had come and gone, but that passed away with the rest.

So work went on, and play likewise, and dances were danced, and tennis tournaments won or lost. And away in Egypt Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour was knocking poor Arabi's fortifications and all his visions of a free and united Egypt together about his ears. And Mrs. Damien, loitering in the lovely Salzkammergut land—the land of glacier, and pine wood and splintered crag—was having her eyes much opened to the Higher Beauty of Nature by Professor Montrose, whenever she could get rid of Mr. Ted Boughton. And at Folkestone, the Lees were gathering loungers daily, and the band of the Royal Denbigh was playing there twice a week by kind permission of Lieut.-Col. Borrodale.

The officers of the Royal Denbigh generally added the attraction of their presence on these occasions, mostly disposing of themselves on the grassy knoll beyond the railings, known for that season as

"Garrison Point," where they held a sort of committee of inspection on the promenaders, who drifted to and fro.

"The place seems full enough. Not that anyone is here," slowly enunciated Dalyell, rather vaguely as to expression, if distinct as to meaning.

"Nobody ever is here before August. My people never think of coming sooner," solemnly declared another youth.

"The Coningtons are here; I saw it in the Visitors' List. The Earl and Countess, and Lady Susan and Lady Patience. I shall leave cards to-morrow. We used to play together when we were children," said Leycester Smith, trying to mention the fact casually for the fifth time that afternoon.

"No! Played with an Earl in your infancy! Do tell us about it!"

"It was with the Ladies Heydown," corrected Smith, with the simple literalness that made him the delight of his brother officers. "They used to come to tea in my nursery—— There! oh, there!" He struggled to his feet and gazed excitedly at an approaching bath-chair. A pretty, delicate girl in it flushed red as a rose at the general attention thus drawn on her, and turned her head sharply away; then turning again and darting a look of anxious scrutiny at the group, bowed hastily and unsmilingly.

"It must be Lady Susan—Susie *I* used to call her!" cried Leycester Smith, whose hand had fluttered up nervously to his hat. "I can hardly remember them apart after all these years. Or no!—it is Patience. She always *had* a colder manner than Susie."

But Edric with rather a grim look scrambled hastily to his feet, and without a word of explanation pushed him out of the way and went after the chair with rapid strides.

He stopped before he reached it. A fit of caution had seized him, as it generally did, several seconds too late to be of practical good. "It's no affair of mine, her being here: I've nothing to do with her," flashed through his mind. But the girl had half looked round and seen him. The chairman drew to one side and stopped, and Edric stepping forward reluctantly raised his hat to Elsie Paramount.

For Elsie Paramount it was, and no other, that looked up at him steadily and unshyly, as he had never seen Elsie look at him before; with no changeful blushes, but a red spot, the fire of excitement, burning in each cheek. And a voice low and deliberate from sheer intensity of purpose said:

"I knew I should meet you, I have come on an errand to you."

(To be continued.)

WHICH MR. BROWN?

IT was morning on the Riviera. Far below, the Mediterranean shimmered, a crescent of shining sapphire. Along the white Corniche road, a vetturino in a cloud of dust was clattering towards Ventimiglio, and the sound of its jingling bells came to us, musically softened through the still bright air. Down the broad slopes where olive woods and gardens were interwoven, the scattered villas, tier upon tier, lay sparkling white under that smiling heaven. The feathery palms glittered in its radiance, and even the dim tones of the olives became rich rather than sad. Towards the west rose a chain of mountains, painted in bright shades of rose and lilac, with the snow covered peaks of a more distant range flashing over their shoulders. The coast line undulated onward, now advancing now receding in delicate azure curves till it melted into thin blue air.

Of all this, however, my cousin Nora and I took little heed. The beautiful in those days had little attraction for us: the ludicrous was what we delighted in. We were on the search for it now, and apparently not in vain.

"Do look, Cissy," said Nora, suddenly leaning so far out of the window that I clutched instinctively at the folds of her gown. "There is an Englishman evidently just arrived by the Midi train, coming up the road. What a fright."

I saw him distinctly. A plain, common-place looking Englishman, who looked about thirty-five. His red whiskers and a somewhat ungraceful carriage were the head and front of his offending against beauty. But in those days Nora and I cultivated a taste for the ridiculous, as wiser people cultivate a taste for the beautiful, and had brought the art of detecting absurdities to a very high and dangerous pitch.

"What an old guy!" I responded. "He is evidently looking out for a pension or hotel. See, the porter behind him is carrying his portmanteau. Oh, Nora, if he were coming here!"

"What fun!" cried Nora. "But I fear it's too good to be true."

We writhed with satisfaction, as our countryman entered the brightly kept garden of the highly recommended pension where we lived. As he walked up the trim gravel road, we discovered to our joy that the absurdity of his appearance increased rather than diminished on closer inspection.

"Oh, Nora, who can he be?"

"A commercial traveller probably."

"A commercial traveller," repeated Uncle Augustus behind us, in a loud and horrified voice. "My dear girls, don't talk of such a thing as a commercial traveller here. I did hope and trust that if this place

had not much else to recommend it, it was at least beyond the reach of anything so appalling."

"He looks like a grocer," observed Nora, not without malice prepense.

"Girls," exclaimed Aunt Caroline, suddenly entering the room, "come away from the window, or hold a parasol over your heads."

I obeyed the first injunction, reluctantly. Nora still continued to crane eagerly forward.

"Nora, do you hear me?" said her mother in her still, cold voice.

"He is going to stay here," cried Nora, in accents of supreme satisfaction, as she drew back into the tempered light of the sitting-room.

"How childish you are, Nora!" said Aunt Caroline, in chill disapproval, as she took up her knitting.

"Ah! if you lose your complexion," observed Uncle Augustus impressively, "you'll find the London season a very different thing, I can tell you."

Nora listened to these parental admonitions with the usual undisturbed placidity which left her small face so unruffably pretty. She seated herself at the centre table where our writing materials were arranged, and taking up a pen and some paper began sketching something with short, quick strokes. I stood yawning and fingering a volume of Tauchnitz, while my uncle continued to read the Weekly Mail.

"I do hope he will be at déjeuner," said Nora presently, with something like real feeling in her liquid voice.

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked her mother.

"Of a terrible Englishman who has just arrived. Ecco."

She held up at arm's length, for the general edification, a clever caricature of the person in question. It was almost impossible to look at it without laughing. Even Aunt Caroline smiled.

"Ah! Nora," said Uncle Augustus, as he examined the sketch more attentively, with the corners of his mouth still twitching. "How well you could draw, if you chose to work at it!"

"Yes, and in a much less dangerous style," remarked Aunt Caroline.

The déjeuner bell began to ring.

"Now, Cissy," whispered Nora, as we walked down behind our elders. "There is a vacant place near us. Perhaps he will take that."

At this suggestion I subsided into laughter, for in those days I was blest with more sense of fun than I had mind or heart enough to manage.

"Come, girls, come," said Uncle Augustus in an authoritative voice. "Don't let us have any nonsense, please."

We took our seats, carefully protected from possible contact with undesirable neighbours by Uncle Augustus on the one side and Aunt Caroline on the other. The remaining inhabitants of the pension filed in and took their places. Aunt Caroline acknow-

ledged their several greetings with frigid dignity. Uncle Augustus's careless nod if less repellant was even more contemptuous. They were all English, and he knew the social status of each. Not one belonged to any higher grade than the "lower middle class."

The chair near Uncle Augustus still remained unfilled. Just as the fish was being handed round, the new inmate of the pension entered and took the vacant place. The thrilling fact was unnecessarily impressed upon me by an almost painfully distinct pressure on my toe from Nora's slender foot. I responded by a sympathetic movement. The interchange of signals did not escape Aunt Caroline, who eyed us severely.

"Do you see the likeness?" said Nora, calmly, turning her great blue eyes slowly upon her father, who bit his lip and frowned.

"Was not the 11.15 very late to day, sir?" said a jovial looking person opposite to us, who never lost any time in entering into conversation with new comers.

"I believe it was," answered our neighbour; "I arrived nearly an hour later than I expected to."

The answer for which we waited breathless with expectation was rather disappointing when it did come. Neither in the voice nor the accentuation was there anything grotesque or vulgar. On the contrary they proclaimed at once that the oddity was a gentleman.

The other went on to make some interrogatory remarks. The new comer answered them courteously but not diffusely, as one who though not anxious to converse, will not absolutely decline to do so.

Nora and I, secretly devouring all that fell from his lips, gathered that he had been ordered abroad for the winter months, after some illness, and that he was wandering aimlessly along the Riviera, not having decided how long or how short his stay would be at Bordighera.

As we passed back through the hall, on our way to our rooms, Nora stopped to bend over the large book wherein the inmates of the pension were invited to write their names. Uncle Augustus, ridiculing this idle curiosity, looked over her shoulder.

"C. H. Brown," he read aloud in a highly contemptuous tone. "Brown—I think I have heard that splendid name before."

At the same moment, the owner of the name passed us and went quickly upstairs. For an instant Uncle Augustus looked disconcerted; the next, he raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"Fortunately," he remarked, "the feelings in that class are not usually very sensitive." Nora walked upstairs before us, imitating Mr. Brown's peculiar carriage with a combined accuracy and caricature that was irresistibly funny. Uncle Augustus laughed heartily, and such was my amusement that Aunt Caroline seriously reproved me for making so much noise upon a public staircase.

"Ah, well!" said my uncle as we entered our sitting-room, "no

wonder they are getting into bad form, living amongst such a set of snobs. I wish to heaven James would answer my letter!"

"Why is Uncle Augustus so anxious to hear from Uncle James?" I asked Nora afterwards, with my usual obtuseness, as we were collecting our drawing materials in the bedroom we shared.

"Oh, because we are hard up, as usual," answered Nora, "and we can't move on till he sends us a cheque. Come along. Don't forget the water. I wish Uncle James *would* write," she continued, as we went into the corridor. "For till he does, we shall have to wait in this dull hole. I don't know what I should do, if it were not for dear Mr. Brown."

"Take care, Nora, you will drop your paint-box. You had better not imitate Mr. Brown just now."

"I can't get my shoulders quite like his," answered Nora, looking back at me.

I frowned and gesticulated in vain; she would not understand that the model himself was coming along the gallery towards her. The next moment, still mimicking Mr. Brown, and still looking roguishly back at me, to see how I liked it, she ran straight against him, and dropped her paint-box with considerable clatter.

Nora, discomposed for once, stood silent and motionless, while Mr. Brown, dropping on one knee, began collecting the scattered paints, and replacing them in their box. Then he rose, and presented it with a deep bow. As he did so, he looked steadily into her beautiful face. It was a strange look that I could hardly understand at the time. As the honest brown eyes rise before me once more, I can see that there was humility, reverence, appeal, all in their pathetic gaze. Nora's sank before it.

At three in the afternoon next day, when the very erratic English post had just arrived, and Uncle Augustus was reading his English letters, she gave another imitation of Mr. Brown. It was rendered singularly life-like by the skilful arrangement round her neck of an antimacassar, which simulated the curve of his coat collar to perfection. I was reduced to tears by the excess of my amusement, and Aunt Caroline looked on with something like indulgence at what was certainly a clever piece of mimicry, when our hilarity was unexpectedly disturbed.

"Take that thing off your shoulders this instant, Nora," cried Uncle Augustus, angrily, "and let's have no more of this folly. Caroline, please listen to what James says here. 'I met Lady Hardy at the Hampshires' yesterday, and hearing you were at Bordighera, she begged me to ask you to make friends, if you came across him, with a cousin of hers, who is somewhere on the Riviera, Charles Brown, you know, who is heir to Lord Galbraith.'"

A pause followed.

"I always said," remarked Aunt Caroline, presently, "that it was a mistake, this new fashion amongst people of position, of travelling about as if they were bagmen."

"Absurd!" cried Uncle Augustus, who was now in the humour to be angry with everyone else for not having been more sharpsighted than himself. "As if a bachelor was likely to go about with a courier and a train of flunkeys. I can't imagine what we were all thinking of. His get up is odd, certainly, but the man himself is by no means a bad-looking fellow."

"There is something so aristocratic in his walk. I remarked it to you the first time I saw him, Cissy," said Nora, gravely.

"Don't talk like a fool, Nora," said her father, indignantly. "Allow me to tell you that there are few things so detrimental to a girl's success in life as a reputation for a sarcastic temper."

"I have always said that Nora's way of making fun of everything was a great mistake," said her mother. "But before we go any further, let us make sure that this is Lord Galbraith's nephew."

"And pray how is that to be done?" asked Uncle Augustus.

"You had better call upon him with the letter, and ask him."

Uncle Augustus treated this, as he always did treat his wife's advice. He began by rejecting, and finished by following it.

"It is all right," he cried, re-entering the room half-an-hour later, in excellent spirits. "It is the man, and a very capital fellow he seems."

"And you are sure he is the right man?" said my aunt.

"As sure as I can be about a thing I could not absolutely catechise him on. He knows the Hardys intimately and all their relations. He has stayed at Galbraith Castle for months; and you know that means a good deal, seeing Galbraith, since he became an invalid, never has anyone but a few favourites of his own family to stay with him."

"Have you asked him to call?" asked Aunt Caroline.

"He is coming in to have coffee with us after dinner. He is fond of drawing. I daresay he will like to see Nora's sketches."

"I think he will like my sketch of himself; don't you, Cissy?" said Nora.

"You will be good enough to go and tear up that vulgar scrawl this instant," said her father, furiously.

"And I think you had better go too, Cissy," said Aunt Caroline, "and do not return till you have ceased giggling. How glad I shall be when Nora and you have given up the ingénue style."

"Don't tear it; please don't tear it," I entreated, when we reached our bedroom. "Give it to me and I will hide it carefully away where nobody can find it."

That evening, before we took our places at the table d'hôte, Mr. Brown was formally introduced to us. There was no sign of resentment, nothing but vivid and unconcealed pleasure in his diffident but self-possessed manner. I detected the true source of this gratification when he was presented to Nora, and coloured visibly as he bowed.

This satisfactory symptom was also observed by Uncle Augustus's business-like eye.

"I think you had better divide our party," he cried, with that genial, open-hearted manner he preserved for people of a certain rank. "You sit here next my wife; and, let me see—Nora, you had better sit here," pointing to the chair next Mr. Brown.

"Thank you," said Nora, calmly and sweetly, as she always did and said the most insolent things; "I had rather sit here." And she took her place as far away from our new acquaintance as circumstances permitted. Uncle Augustus looked black with rage, but a quick glance from my more politic aunt warned him not to call any more attention to this very unflattering proceeding; so he swallowed his wrath, and himself took the rejected place. I was so entertained that I dropped my napkin-ring, and fished for it till I had recovered my composure.

"If they think I am going to have that old fright thrust upon me because he is heir to a peerage they are very much mistaken," whispered Nora to me under cover of Uncle Angustus's sonorous voice, which was describing the delights of a visit to the Duke of Hampshire's place in Scotland. After dinner, Mr. Brown accompanied us to our rooms.

"Now, Nora," said her father in a pleasant voice, frowning upon her expressively from behind Mr. Brown, "I want Mr. Brown to see your sketches."

"Certainly," said Nora with cheerful, and it must be added, unexpected alacrity. She cleared a place on the centre-table, and spread out upon it a large portfolio filled with sketches.

"Shall I get you a chair?" asked Mr. Brown, timidly.

"No, thank you," said Nora, quietly; "I am going to bed, and will wish you good-night." And accordingly she left the room.

An unpleasant silence followed, broken by Aunt Caroline.

"I don't think Nora must be allowed to walk so far as she did to-day. It is too much for her. Cissy, you must show the sketches for her."

I did, but it was not the same thing. Mr. Brown listened to my explanations with rapt attention, and thanked me effusively at the end, but he was visibly depressed. He retired early, and Uncle Augustus gave vent to his feelings.

"After all," observed Aunt Caroline, calmly, "it is your own fault. You have always encouraged Nora's wilful temper and impertinent manners. You said it was effective."

"And so it is. With her looks, it takes very well indeed. You know yourself what a success she has been. But, of course, that kind of thing may be carried too far—a confounded deal too far. At this rate we shall see her unmarried at twenty-five."

"It will not be my fault if she is. But I don't take quite such a gloomy view of the case as you who are always in extremes. As long

as we are civil, Nora's whimsical ways will not disgust Mr. Brown—rather the reverse. I imagine he is a man who is not easily discouraged."

Aunt Caroline was right. Mr. Brown was not easily discouraged, at least in one sense. He was the least self-confident of men, but his very humility made him, in some ways, invulnerable. Nora's rebuffs deterred him from venturing to approach her, or speak to her, but did not, it would seem, destroy the delight with which he basked in her presence. His feeling towards her was an interesting study to me, so unlike was it to any of the numerous attachments Nora had inspired. Mr. Brown himself was equally original, and as his entertainment was thrust on me by Nora, I had ample opportunities for probing this new specimen of male character, which I used mercilessly.

"You admire my cousin very much?" I said to him one day as we were walking, he and I a little behind the others, up a valley where the morning light, broken by the olive boughs, fell chequered with shadow on the yellow path.

He had left off blushing for some time, but once again at this question he grew crimson.

"Yes," he said simply and rather sadly, "I do."

"Do you think her very beautiful?"

"I have known more beautiful women," he answered thoughtfully; "but she has the sweetest face I ever saw."

"What? when she looked as she did just now," I asked maliciously, "when you offered to carry her shawl?"

"That was not her real expression. She only wears it when she is displeased."

"And what reason had she to be displeased?"

"I am often displeasing to ladies; young ladies, I mean. It is not everyone," he added, with a look of admiring gratitude, "who is as good-natured as you are."

"He must be falling in love with you," said Nora, when I repeated to her this conversation.

"Oh, Nora, he would not desert you for anybody in the world."

This prediction seemed singularly falsified by the event next day.

We were all returning from a walking expedition, or at least an expedition which was partly performed on foot, with our friends Lady Thorne and her daughters, who had come over from San Remo to go with us. We were to walk from Dolce Acqua to Campo Rosso, where our carriage waited to drive us all back to Bordighera. Uncle Augustus had gone on to order tea, or rather hot water for our own tea, at the inn where we had put up our horses. As we drew near Campo Rosso, in a somewhat straggling and disconnected manner, it was suddenly discovered that two were missing: Lady Thorne's youngest daughter Mabel, and her governess, Miss Briggs.

"The last I saw of them," said the eldest Miss Thorne, "was on the bridge, just out of the town. Miss Briggs seemed to be leaning against the parapet. What can be the meaning of it?"

It was quickly explained by the second daughter. Miss Briggs had sprained or injured her ankle as they were coming down from the castle. It hurt so much that she had been obliged to rest on the bridge. After that she had limped on a little, but the pain became so bad that she could not move a step farther, and was now sitting on a stone by the roadside, not far from Dolce Acqua.

Now the point of what follows will be lost if I do not explain what Miss Briggs was like. She was one of the many people whom at that phase of our existence Nora and I rather imagined had been kindly brought forward by destiny to gratify our omniverous love of ridicule. She was thin, angular and grotesquely plain, and these qualities were rendered more intense by everything that dress could do. On this special occasion she wore a gown whose shade of drab might have dimmed the complexion of a Hebe, and a hat under which Venus herself might have looked unattractive, and would certainly have looked dowdy.

"So like Miss Briggs," said Lady Thorne, looking round upon us with the air of a long-suffering though sorely-tried saint. "She is one of those persons who always manage to be ill or hurt at the most inconvenient times. What is to be done?"

"If you will allow me," said Mr. Brown, "I will go back for her at once. Perhaps with my help she may be able to walk. If not, I will get a mule or a donkey at Dolce Acqua and bring her back on that."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Brown," cried Lady Thorne with immense emphasis, "I could not think of allowing you to take such trouble."

"It is hardly necessary," said Aunt Caroline; "we can send something back for her when we reach Campo Rosso."

"It is not the least trouble," said Mr. Brown. "I think my going will be the best and quickest way. No doubt the lady will feel anxious at being alone, under the circumstances."

I was looking at Nora, to see how she would receive this last example of eccentricity. Her eyes were dilated, her soft curving mouth, beautiful ever, and in every mood, was open with astonishment, mingled with some other feeling I could not quite make out.

"Mr. Brown," she said as he turned, "must you really go? I am so tired; I was just going to ask you to give me an arm." And then this accomplished actress sighed and drooped a little.

Amazement, bewilderment, and keen distress were painted in quick succession on Mr. Brown's plain, honest face. He cast an imploring look around, as if entreating one of us to come to his aid; but nobody responded. Finally, he answered in the tone of a man who feels himself compelled to act like a brute:

"I am very sorry, but I think perhaps I ought to go and look

after Miss Briggs. A sprained ankle is a serious thing, and, altogether ——"

His voice died away. I thought that he was going to succumb.

"I think," he said suddenly, "that I ought to be off at once."

And he went.

Nora made no comment, but her great blue eyes seemed to grow larger with deep thought. Later on, as Mr. Brown was lifting Miss Briggs from her mule to the carriage, as reverently as if she had been a beautiful princess, Nora stood observing him as she might have observed the movements of some new and unheard of animal suddenly introduced to her.

"Are you jealous, Nora?" I whispered. But she only smiled in answer, as if she did not quite know what I was saying.

Next day we returned from a walk, to learn with great delight that "un monsieur anglais" had arrived, and was waiting to see us in our sitting-room. We hurried upstairs in great excitement, to find a tall, fair young man, whose appearance seemed suggestive of exquisite cleanliness, refreshing to the eyes of exiled English. It was an old playfellow and comrade, Oliver Vane, of whose pedigree and connections Uncle Augustus, were he writing, would give you the most satisfactory details.

After the first burst of pleasure and congratulation came the question:

"How did you know we were here?"

"I didn't, till I saw your names in that big book downstairs. I really stopped on my way to join the others at Nice, to look up a friend of mine who is staying here."

"Brown, of course," cried Uncle Augustus.

"So it is," answered Oliver, evidently surprised. "You know him?"

"Rather," said Uncle Augustus, in a manner that seemed to imply that the question was a superfluous one concerning anyone who was worth knowing. "Galbraith and I are very old friends."

"Galbraith," repeated Oliver, in rather a puzzled tone. "Oh, of course," he added, suddenly. "Brown was there for some time, wasn't he, with young Lester?"

"And his cousin, Lady Hardy," continued Uncle Augustus.

"Oh, that's a different man altogether," said Oliver. "That's Charley Brown of the 12th. I thought he was at Monaco. My Brown isn't nephew to anybody that I ever heard of, and certainly not heir to anybody or anything. He takes pupils. He coached me for my exam. and got me through too."

"Oh, that's a very different sort of person indeed," said Uncle Augustus, rather contemptuously. "I know nothing about your Brown."

"No, I thought you weren't likely to know him," said Oliver, simply. "They're very different altogether. Charley Brown is very handsome and——"

"Handsome," said I in amazement.

"Yes, handsome," repeated Uncle Augustus, angrily. "I quite agree with Oliver. When one comes to know him, there is something very good looking indeed about him."

"Don't you admire him?" said Oliver looking rather pleased. "I thought he was quite a ladies' man. Now my Brown isn't much to look at. He is badly got up and ——"

"He has red whiskers," said Nora, watching him attentively.

"Yes. How did you guess that? He isn't handsome, but he's one of the best fellows that ever lived," said Oliver with unwonted fervour. And then came a long panegyric of Mr. Brown and his perfections, with passing allusions to his opposite Brown as being a dark, handsome little fellow, fascinating but not too trustworthy, and wildly anticipating his future income.

I must say I heard only scraps of it all, for my attention was absorbed in watching, with amusement and something like fright, Uncle Augustus's face, as the awful truth gradually dawned upon him. He grew paler and paler, but did not speak. Aunt Caroline's lips tightened ominously. Even the not too clear-sighted Oliver seemed to become conscious that something was wrong. Probably he interpreted it to be that he was staying too long, for at last he withdrew somewhat hurriedly.

After he was gone, the storm burst from Uncle Augustus. There was nothing like storm in the contemptuous calm with which Aunt Caroline pointed out that it was all his own fault. Nora and I retired in the midst of the discussion, and only returned when comparative calm had been restored.

"Well it is a tremendous nuisance," said Uncle Augustus, "but there's no good lamenting over it. The only thing we can do now is to let him down as quickly as we—took him up, unfortunately. He will dine with Vane to-night, so that is one difficulty got over. Now to-morrow we go with the Thornes to Monte Carlo, and Brown has been asked, or at least fancies he has been asked to go with us. Now the thing will be to make him understand that he is not wanted!"

"Oh, how shall we do that?" I asked, immensely interested and amused.

"Nothing is easier my dear child," said my uncle, loftily, "to people who have some experience and *savoir vivre*. Leave it to your aunt and me. All you will have to do is to bow to Mr. Brown instead of shaking hands with him. And Nora—" he chuckled well-pleased, and pulled her small, shell-like ear affectionately—"as for Nora, she has only to go on as she has been doing."

Next morning, at about ten, the omnibus which was to take us to the station stood waiting at the door of the pension. Aunt Caroline had a headache, and would not go with us. We went downstairs

laden with all the wraps, without which even in that much vaunted climate the wary English will not venture far.

The crystalline clearness and sparkle of the day pleased even us. Not a speck of white dimmed that blue dome that arched above us, higher than any island sky ever rose. The colours of the mountains were almost crudely vivid. On the coast line we could see Mentone, dots of white upon an azure line, and the glitter of "the sinful sunny heights" of Monte Carlo.

Near, on the gravel walk, stood Mr. Brown, with a certain air of indecision, which convinced me that he had not been invited to accompany us as distinctly as his timidity required.

Uncle Augustus gave an admonitory cough, and at once began the "letting down process."

"Morning," he said, superciliously. "Get in girls."

Mr. Brown's surprise at this greeting must have been lost in amazement at the next he received. It was from Nora.

"Good morning, Mr. Brown," she said in her most cordial manner, "I was afraid you were not coming."

Nobody spoke. Mr. Brown looked bewildered, as well he might. Nora sprang into the omnibus, and her father followed, darting a furious look at her, as he took his place opposite.

"Mr. Brown, make haste, please," said Nora, leaning out of the carriage to look at him where he stood a little behind us.

"Hold your tongue, Nora," muttered her father. "You know very well," he added aloud, "that Mr. Brown is not coming."

"Oh yes, he is. You are coming, aren't you, Mr. Brown?"

As she said this, in almost wooing tones, the beautiful eyes that had hitherto been so disdainfully averted were turned upon him with a look of the sweetest entreaty that ever appealed to mortal man. Poor Mr. Brown! He looked, as he no doubt felt, as if he did not know where he was or what he was doing. Uncle Augustus's meaning could not have altogether escaped him, but the magnetic influence of Nora's glance predominated over all else. He gave some indistinct answer and got into the omnibus looking like a man who is only half awake.

It was a silent drive. Everybody was uncomfortable except Nora, who brought forth a new and very smart pair of unstretched gloves, and smoothed them carefully on to her slender fingers. I wondered what Mr. Brown would do at the station whilst we waited for our train, but he was not left in any difficulty. Directly he had taken his ticket, Nora gave him her parasol to hold whilst she finished buttoning her interminable gloves. In this position they were standing when our train arrived.

The Thornes, who had got in at San Remo, were on the look-out for us. Lady Thorne, who prided herself on her penetration, gave a quick glance at Nora and Mr. Brown, and then threw a congratulatory one at Uncle Augustus.

"We are too many for one carriage," she called out, looking very intelligent as she came out on to the platform. "So I think we had better divide. You will take care of my girls, and I will take yours and Mr. Brown."

There was neither time nor opportunity to explain to her the real state of the case. There was nothing left but to accept this arrangement. Lady Thorne at once called me to the opposite window from that at which Nora and Mr. Brown had placed themselves, and began talking to me with almost ostentatious eagerness. This did not the least prevent her observing them. "What a change!" she observed in a low voice to me.

The remark was not uncalled for. The two seemed to have changed places. Nora was lavishing attentions upon him; and he, if not altogether irresponsive, was so utterly dazzled and confounded by them, that he evidently was at loss for words. He answered in low monosyllables as Nora commented on the deep valleys where the brown streams gurgled through olive groves and gardens; on the shining peaks of mountains that lay far inland; on the great scented beds where violets were ripening for all the capitals of Europe; on the dark orange and lemon trees, drooping under the weight of the golden fruit. At Ventamiglia, the frontier town, we had to change carriages, and Uncle Augustus made a gallant attempt to redistribute his party, and to enlighten Lady Thorne.

"I have something to tell you, Lady Thorne," he whispered frantically.

"Alla partenza," screamed the Italian guard.

"I think I know what it is," said Lady Thorne, archly, as she scrambled hastily into the carriage, closely followed by Nora, Mr. Brown, and myself.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to her, that Nora and Mr. Brown should be the first to get out of the carriage at Monte Carlo, and that Mr. Brown should go after Nora, who hurried in a determined fashion towards the exit.

"Well, my dear child," she said, as we got out more leisurely, "I am so glad your uncle's wishes have been ——"

"Good heavens! where is your cousin?" said Uncle Augustus, suddenly appearing at my elbow.

"She is half way up the stairs by this time," said Lady Thorne, smiling. "And I need hardly tell you who is her companion. I am sure I congratulate you most heartily."

"Lady Thorne," said my uncle, solemnly, "will you have the goodness to listen to me for a few minutes. Cissy, go after Nora, this instant, and tell her I insist upon her returning at once."

I knew the way very well, for I had been there before, but I felt that my uncle must be beside himself to allow me to go as far alone in such a place. There was no sign of Nora or Mr. Brown on the stone steps that led to the sumptuous gardens. I ran up the stairs

and only paused for a moment, breathless, not with the exertion, but with laughter. Of all Nora's mischievous pranks, this seemed to me the funniest.

Then I looked up suddenly, and saw them on the terrace above. Mr. Brown was speaking, and so earnestly; Nora, for a wonder, looked thoughtful, and was gazing silently at the view beneath them. I turned to look at it too. It moved even my shallow giddy self of those days. Shutting my eyes, I can see it again, vague but beautiful as a dream. The great rocks towering protectingly behind Monaco; the bright red roofs of the town itself straggling downwards from the heights to the bright blue bay where the boats cluster; the brilliant tropical plants and trees of the gardens flaunting around us; the thick dark woods that stretch outward into the purple waters; the fringe of foam, snow mingled with light, that breaks round the golden bay and jutting green headland; the hue of that wonderful sea, dark as a summer night, vivid as the petals of a forget-me-not; the no less marvellous zenith, a fount of living colour that neither eye nor fancy can fathom; and over all dazzling, radiant sunlight, in which mist and cloud are lost, shadow is but a soft bloom, and colour glows like fire.

A dreamy feeling stole over me, in which existence began to present itself to me in other aspects than that of a joke. But this unwonted mood was quickly dispelled by the sound of Uncle Augustus's far reaching voice in the distance. I hurried up towards Nora, calling out without preface or demur:

"Nora, Nora, do come back. Uncle Augustus is really angry at your going off like this."

Mr. Brown, who seemed startled at this intelligence, moved as if to lead the way down, as Nora seemed in no hurry. We two followed him, leisurely, behind.

"Nora," I whispered, "I suppose you are trying to make Mr. Brown propose. Has he done it yet?"

"How dare you?" said Nora, suddenly turning upon me, in real anger for the first time in her life; and then to complete my unspeakable amazement she burst into tears.

The others joined us, and Mr. Brown turned with them in time to witness this astonishing spectacle. Nora, through her tears, murmured something about the sun and a headache.

"Then you had better come and walk quietly with me," said Uncle Augustus, sternly, and took possession of her accordingly.

It was as gloomy a day's outing as ever was gone through, even by English pleasure seekers. Uncle Augustus was smouldering with suppressed rage. Mr. Brown was evidently completely and hopelessly bewildered. Lady Thorne, feeling that she had made herself ridiculous, was naturally cross. Her daughters were scandalised. Even I was sobered. A hollow pretence of interest was kept up by us all, as we wandered through the gardens, watched the gamblers in the big hall, sauntered round the shops, and lunched at last on

chocolate and whipped cream. It was all like a dream, and a very unpleasant one, and we were thankful when it was over.

It was evening when we descended at the door of the pension. The sky was darkening above us, and the mountains to the left were of deep transparent violet, against a background of molten gold.

Nora went upstairs at once, and I followed her, leaving the gentlemen to bring up the wraps.

Aunt Caroline raised her eyes inquiringly from the book she was reading as we entered.

"Well, we've had a delightful day," I remarked, shamelessly.

"Rather a long one," said Aunt Caroline. "Nora looks quite tired."

Uncle Augustus entered, carrying a bundle of wraps, and banged the door behind him.

"I hear you have had a pleasant day," remarked Aunt Caroline, stifling a yawn.

"We have had an infernal day," cried Uncle Augustus, dashing his hat on to a chair and speaking in a voice that corresponded with the words. "Nora has behaved in a manner which I can only describe as disgraceful. I should like very much to know, Nora, how you, who, by your airs and graces, have disgusted more than one man of whose attentions any girl might be proud, you, who could barely be polite to admirers of your own rank, could have condescended to flirt in the scandalous way you have flirted to-day, with that—that cad, Brown."

At the word cad, Nora straightened herself, and I saw she was herself again. The face she turned upon her father wore its accustomed expression of fearless placidity.

"What do you mean by it?" cried Uncle Augustus, imperiously.

"I mean to marry Mr. Brown," said Nora, softly and sweetly, and then she began to pull out and smooth her gloves.

"Marry," began Uncle Augustus, but the words died upon his lips. Aunt Caroline sat erect, her eyes fixed upon Nora. There was a moment's silence which permitted us to hear a gentle tapping at the door. "Entrate," cried Aunt Caroline, and in obedience to the summons Mr. Brown entered. It was impossible that he could fail to see that he had interrupted a scene, and a very unpleasant one. Much embarrassed, he muttered an apology, and laying down the shawl he had come to deliver, prepared to depart.

"Stop, sir," said Uncle Augustus, in a voice in which insolence and fury were very equally blended; "since you are here, be good enough to explain, if you can, your infamous conduct. You thrust yourself into our society on the plea of being Lord Galbraith's nephew, and then take advantage of the position thus gained to propose to my daughter—you, a penniless tutor."

I watched stupefaction give place to indignation on Mr. Brown's face as he listened to this extraordinary speech. For a moment his soft brown eyes flashed and his lip curled, as if he would have

spoken his anger. Then he checked himself. When he did speak, his manner was cold and calm.

"Mr. Vivian," he said, very deliberately, "you are evidently at present hardly master of yourself. When you are, I shall expect you, and you as a gentleman will not fail, to apologise to me for what you have just said. You are perfectly well aware that I never thrust myself upon you, and that I never pretended to be any other person than I am. As to your daughter ——" here his voice faltered, and he glanced in humble appeal towards Nora—"I have not presumed so far as to——"

"Oh, no," cried Nora, interrupting him, in the clearest and most untremulous voice, "Mr. Brown has not proposed to me. It is I who propose to him, and when I said I was going to marry him, of course I meant if he would have me."

"Nora," exclaimed her mother, in a very low voice.

Mr. Brown looked sadly at the girl's bright face.

"When you are older, dear Miss Vivian," he said, reproachfully, but gently, "and have learnt what pain is, you will be sorry to think you ever made sport of the suffering of others."

He turned to go, but Nora sprang forward and barred his exit.

"I was not laughing," she said, eagerly, with a curious little catch in her voice, as if she had been running too fast, "I was perfectly serious. Indeed, I mean it. I will marry you if you will have me."

Uncle Augustus came forward, as if he would have struck them both, but Mr. Brown put him back with a movement of his arm, and a still more authoritative look.

Then he turned and looked at Nora with the strangest mixture of wonder, and joy, and sadness, and unutterable love.

"How can I thank you?" he said, in a very low voice. "You are better even than I believed you to be, and to have been so honoured by such a woman will make me feel happier and prouder all my life. But," here he drew a long breath, "I love you far too well to accept such an offer. You are too young to know how poor and insignificant I am, and how high a place in life such beauty as yours may claim."

He stooped, and kissed her hand.

"God bless you, and give you to a man who shall be able to value his prize."

The next moment he was gone, and the door had closed behind him. I sprang forward just in time to catch Nora as she fainted.

The doctor, as he went out of our rooms that night, left us very grave. He hinted mysteriously about a certain delicacy of the heart in Nora. No agitation, no opposition, was the sum and substance of his directions.

"I haven't the slightest faith in these foreign doctors," cried Uncle Augustus.

"Then let us go home, and at once consult Sir Michael Smith," said his wife.

"Thank goodness, Brown is off already," said my uncle.

"It makes very little difference," retorted Aunt Caroline; "I see how it will end."

"Merciful heaven! What a desperate thing it is!" cried Uncle Augustus, in an uncontrollable burst of despair. "Nora, the beauty of the family, who might have married anybody. Cissy," he cried, in a tone of almost piteous entreaty, "do you think she really cares for him?"

Unfortunately I could give no comfort. I, also, taken aback at this extraordinary infatuation, had made an attempt to dispel it not long since. I had gone into the room where Nora was resting, and had fished up from the depths of my trunk the caricature of Mr. Brown I had hidden there about three weeks ago.

"Nora," I said, approaching the bed, and holding the paper out, "do you remember this?"

As she took it from me, I fully expected from her expression that she would tear it to pieces. But her face gradually softened into a smile. She looked at it, still smiling, till tears gathered and sparkled in her eyes.

"It is like him!" she exclaimed, and then—she kissed it.

After that, I felt that her case was indeed hopeless.

Sir Michael Smith confirmed the verdict of the French doctor. He was even more impressive in his injunctions that nothing should be allowed to agitate or distress the patient. As she continued firm in her determination to marry Mr. Brown, there was nothing to do but to send for him, and even he was compelled to acknowledge that if Sir Michael's prescription was to be faithfully carried out the wedding must take place.

So it did. Nora has always seemed radiantly happy, and her husband's adoration remains undiminished by time, but Uncle Augustus has never been the same man since.

Aunt Caroline bore it more philosophically. As she always observed, it was her husband's fault entirely. This is not consoling to him. Nor were the congratulatory letters of his various relations more soothing. The only person who really sympathises with him is Mr. Brown himself. When he is told that his father-in-law still remains unreconciled to the match his daughter had made, Mr. Brown shakes his head compassionately, and says, "No wonder."

UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," &c.

Arms of Stockholm.

THE little boat had gone her way after leaving Skokloster; called at innumerable small stations; entered the Upsala Canal; steamed up to the landing stage. We left the interesting lady-passenger one of the small crowd upon the quay, and went our way in search of the Stadtshotellet. Omnibusses, porters, flys, all were conspicuous by their absence. This small boat was evidently not worth the trouble of looking up. Le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle. It seldom brought passengers for inns or hotels. So, in the hands of fate, we marched up the canal side, under the shade of the trees, enjoying the only picturesque thoroughfare Upsala possesses. It has other thoroughfares, but they are not picturesque.

We went on until it seemed advisable to consult an Oracle. Fate is capricious and does not always lead one to desired havens. The Oracle bade us cross the second bridge and keep straight on. We did so, and presently came to a long, low building, with the welcome word *Stadtshotellet* inscribed over the wide doorway. It looked grave and quiet, as befitted a University town. On a steep hill at the end of the street was a large, solemn-looking structure, the words *Carolina Rediviva* in gold letters stretching across it. This was the famous Library of Upsala, with its countless volumes and priceless MSS. The cathedral was behind the inn, the Archbishop's palace at the side, the colleges were just beyond. We were in the odour of sanctity.

But, for the present, more mundane affairs called for attention. Libraries and cathedrals, palaces and colleges are admirable in their way, but everything has its season.

> Leaves have their time to bud and fall,
> The heart for sorrowing;
> The bird that lately cleaved the sky
> Lies dead with folded wing.

Our duty just now was to secure foothold in the Stadtshotellet. We anticipated no difficulty. The town seemed empty, the streets deserted. Only by chance had we lighted upon the one solitary oracle who had given us faithful counsel. The cathedral clock rang out the hour and startled the very air we breathed. The hotel itself appeared abandoned.

We turned in. Not a soul to be seen. A large empty courtyard forming three sides of a quadrangle. The fourth side, open and expanding into a garden, was set out with small tables, a few arbours, a statue or two representing nothing less frivolous than Justice and Wisdom undraped and shivering. A few trees completed the adornment of this abode of gods and mortals. Nothing living or human was visible. Inroads and arrivals were not expected. The host was napping, his dependants were at play. If Jack had chosen to run off with the hotel in a sack as he did with the harp, there was neither cock to crow nor giant to awaken.

We looked about. No one came. The office was empty. All the rooms on the left were being renovated and refreshed. A smell of varnish made it further necessary to escape this part of the house. At last a bell-handle declared itself and we awoke echoes only inferior to those lately raised by the cathedral clock. This presently brought forth a female Mercury, not winged, but wise, who looked at us as if we had just come from Olympus, and she wondered how we had made the transit. Trains were not due, boats were all in, there were no clouds about, and no celestial car.

On desiring to be quartered, she assumed a perplexed air, and intimated that, always full, they were now simply crowded. Part of the house also was being done up; a statement to which our five senses bore witness. Then she conducted us to rooms, gloomy and uninhabitable; small, dark, funereal; an atmosphere of ghosts, a suspicion of murders. Declined with thanks. Next she led the way to a magnificent suite of seven rooms opening into each other. The Archbishop might have held a church congress here, but they were superfluous in size and glory for a small select party of two.

Finally this cunning Mercury was seized with an idea; led the way through dark, mysterious corridors, piloted us up sundry flights of stairs and down others, to quarters charming and compact. The windows overlooked the little coffee-tables, the statues of Justice and Wisdom, the trees, the distant seats of learning. Nothing could be more edifying. This Mercury was wise in her generation, but so were we in ours. With a reverence but a thwarted look, she departed to unseen regions.

Presently going out to reconnoitre, we met three ladies coming up the staircase. They were under guidance of the landlord, who had put in an appearance with the rattling up of the station omnibus. The train from Stockholm was just in, bringing with it those Americans—very quiet and nice they were—whom we had left that morning breakfasting at the Grand Hotel. It is thus with nearly all who visit Sweden. These ladies little guessed the pleasant day they had missed upon the water, so admirable an introduction to the sober realities of Upsala. It would have been cruel kindness to enlighten them, now that it was too late. There are so many people in the world whose delight is to inform you that the one thing you have missed was worth more that all the rest you saw and did, put together.

Outside, the streets were depressing. No students rushing about in bands; no far-off sounds of riot and revelry; no enticing wine cellars, like those choice German rendezvous of good-fellowship. No frivolity here, one could only suppose. Swedish students were evidently very different from German; more sober and meritorious. Upsala was no Heidelberg, where duelling is the favourite recreation, and every student is ready to take up both his own and everyone else's quarrel. This atmosphere did honour to the residence of an Archbishop, the seat of a University, the possession of the only real cathedral in Sweden worthy of the name.

It was so near the hotel, this cathedral, that we turned to it at once. Standing on high ground, above the level of the town, it is only

UPSALA.

looked down upon by such buildings as the old Castle, the Library, and the colleges. It is the most interesting part of Upsala, and the close, or precincts, are quaint and uncommon. The cathedral, built of red brick, is massive and somewhat heavy, but imposing. It is simply and severely Gothic. The towers are plain and unfinished. They want spires, and had them until the beginning of the last century, when they were destroyed by fire. The west doorway is crude to ugliness. The windows are almost wholly without stained glass, so that the interior is cold and unsympathetic. Imagination is not influenced by beautiful tints and tones. The pavement is not dyed by rainbow hues creeping upward with the sun. The "dim religious light," prevalent in so many foreign cathedrals, especially in those of Spain—of which that of Valencia is one of the most imposing—here comes only with the ghostly shadows of evening.

The cathedral of Upsala was begun in the thirteenth and finished in the fifteenth century. Like most of its kind it has gone through changes and destruction by fire until the original building could no longer be recognised. Many of the alterations are badly done. The towers are out of harmony with the rest of the building. The west front is gloomier than a prison entrance. The bells have very little music in them. They mark the hours with an iron tongue that vibrates far over the immense plain of the surrounding country, but does not charm.

The red brick with the lapse of time has toned to a deep and picturesque colour. It possesses more warmth but less purity and refinement than the orthodox and ecclesiastical stone. The size of

OLD UPSALA.

the cathedral is heightened, and also its effect, by a sojourn in Sweden where cathedrals are not, and churches are cold, formal, and uninteresting. The mother-church of Upsala comes as a relief; the eye rests upon it with a certain long-desired satisfaction.

In bygone ages when the kings of Sweden had their residence at Old Upsala, it was also the seat of the Archbishops. In those days the present Upsala was its harbour and commercial centre. In the thirteenth century the kings went to Stockholm and the Archbishops to New Upsala. Perhaps the two powers felt in those early times as a great many very good people feel in these: they would be excellent friends if they did not meet too often.

Thus this part of the country is of great historical interest. It was the stronghold of paganism, and here heathen superstition has left its traces. Here christianity was first preached in the ninth century

and here its disciples fought their hardest battles. Here kings had their thrones and Archbishops held sway. But whatever of commercial aspect New Upsala may have possessed in days and centuries gone by has long disappeared. It is now characterised by all the gravity befitting a Cathedral and University town, and all the deadly-liveliness that so often goes hand-in-hand with them.

Upsala's past, for all these reasons, gives it a legitimate interest in the present, and makes the silence of her streets to-day all the more conspicuous.

In the evening light the cathedral looked venerable and stately. Perfect quiet reigned. The sky was deepening with twilight; shadows were falling, veiling the quaint houses of the close. A church, still older than the cathedral, small and grey, reposed westward. Beyond it was the famous Library; above, on the highest point, the old Castle, not at all ornamental and no longer very useful.

The town yielded quite a different scene and influence. Streets without beauty or attraction, always excepting that possessing the river, the Fyrisä, where the steamers lay alongside under the shadow of the trees. The rest is commonplace, with few picturesque bits or ancient houses to give it tone and character. It was not enlivening, but very much the opposite. Yet it is said to be a pleasant place to sojourn in; where houses are good, and living is cheap, and people are learned, and friendly and hospitable to the strangers within their gates.

Music was going on in two different parts of the town. We wandered first of all in quest of the more distant, wondering what sort of entertainment this Archiepiscopal seat of learning would furnish its grave inhabitants. Disappointment of course awaited us; the same old story; a little extra frivolity, perhaps, but that was all. Possibly the great minds here find it necessary to unbend. The bow always strung weakens. A tame orchestra played light and silly music. An open air theatre furnished very foolish performances. The large enclosure was covered with small round tables. An assembled crowd listened with marked appreciation to the entertainment. Those who would not pay for their pleasure meanly stood without the barriers, where they heard and saw just as well as those within. These were the working people of the town, and the idlers who slouched about with hands in pockets, a reckless expression, shoulders up to their ears.

We had expected better of Upsala, and with sad reflections turned away in search of fresh fields.

The other Tivoli, if so called, was a combination of indoor and outdoor entertainment. An orchestra in the garden, and a café brilliantly lighted within and without, set forth their temptations. Perhaps the hour had not yet struck for the habitués to assemble; perhaps the attractions of the rival we had just left were more popular. Whatever the cause, the audience might be here numbered by units.

It was depressing, and we settled ourselves outside on a bench

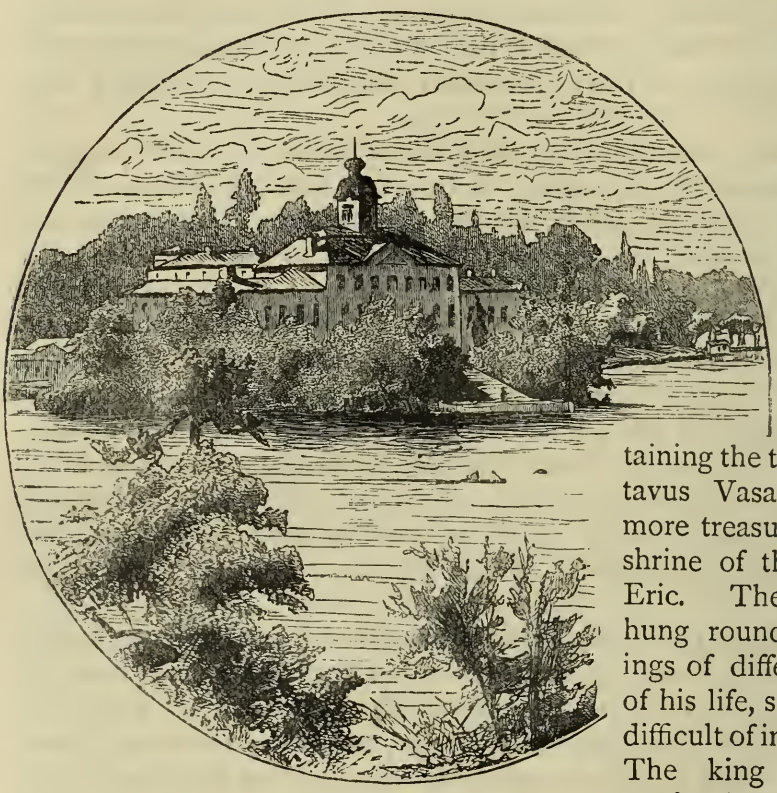
facing a quiet stream that ran at right angles into the Fyrisä. Here distance lent enchantment to the music. Darkness fell; the cathedral towers stood out above the town and the trees like shadows upon the deepening sky. On a steep hill to the left loomed the old castle, as it has loomed for three centuries and more. It has fallen from its high estate. Having entertained kings, received embassies, been the scene of regal pageants, witnessed the abdication of an eccentric Queen, it is now half a ruin, and gives a residence to the Governor of the county. Very grim it looked against the night sky, interesting only for historical reasons. The stars came out, "the spangled heavens, a shining train;" the night wind turned chilly; on the stream before us a mist began to rise; the trees around grew shadowy and mysterious.

We wandered past the little weir, down to the steamers that had successfully helped us on our way to Upsala. Side by side, the larger looked like a leviathan overshadowing the smaller. They were quiet after their day's work, waiting for the morrow to begin again. The little crowd had dispersed. The interesting lady had disappeared with her note book and her husband. Silently flowed the stream, on, on, towards Lake Malaren and the Baltic. Opposite were the red-brick water-works; or, perhaps, it was only a hydropathic establishment; or even it might be the public laundry. We never quite found out what it was; and, as Mr. Toots would have said, it was not of much consequence. Everything had settled down for the night: an example to be followed in this dull town, where evidently Robin Adair was not, and would not come for all the ballads "that ever were said or sung."

After breakfast the next morning our first visit was to the cathedral. Last night we had seen only the outside: the doors had been all fast barred and bound against the shades of evening. To-day we went in search of the Sacristan or Verger, who lived in a small house in the close. The good man was away—they are so often away when wanted—but his good woman was at home and equal to the occasion. She did quite as well, and proved a very interesting guide. Armed with the great keys of the church: keys that would have done honour to the figure of St. Peter in Rome—whose toe has been worn to a shadow by the kisses of the devout: and hastily throwing on bonnet and shawl, she accompanied us across the precincts. With true professional manner, she threw wide the north doorway. These comparatively small North and South doorways are both more interesting and beautiful than the large, offending West front. Pointed archways are adorned with crumbling statues and empty niches and carved work worn with the lapse of ages. Far above, in nooks and crevices, pigeons cooed and fluttered and found a refuge. One of the portals was decorated with a figure of St. Lawrence and the six days of Creation. The figures of Adam and Eve bringing up the rear, left everything to be desired in the way of symmetry, and were quite as shivering and

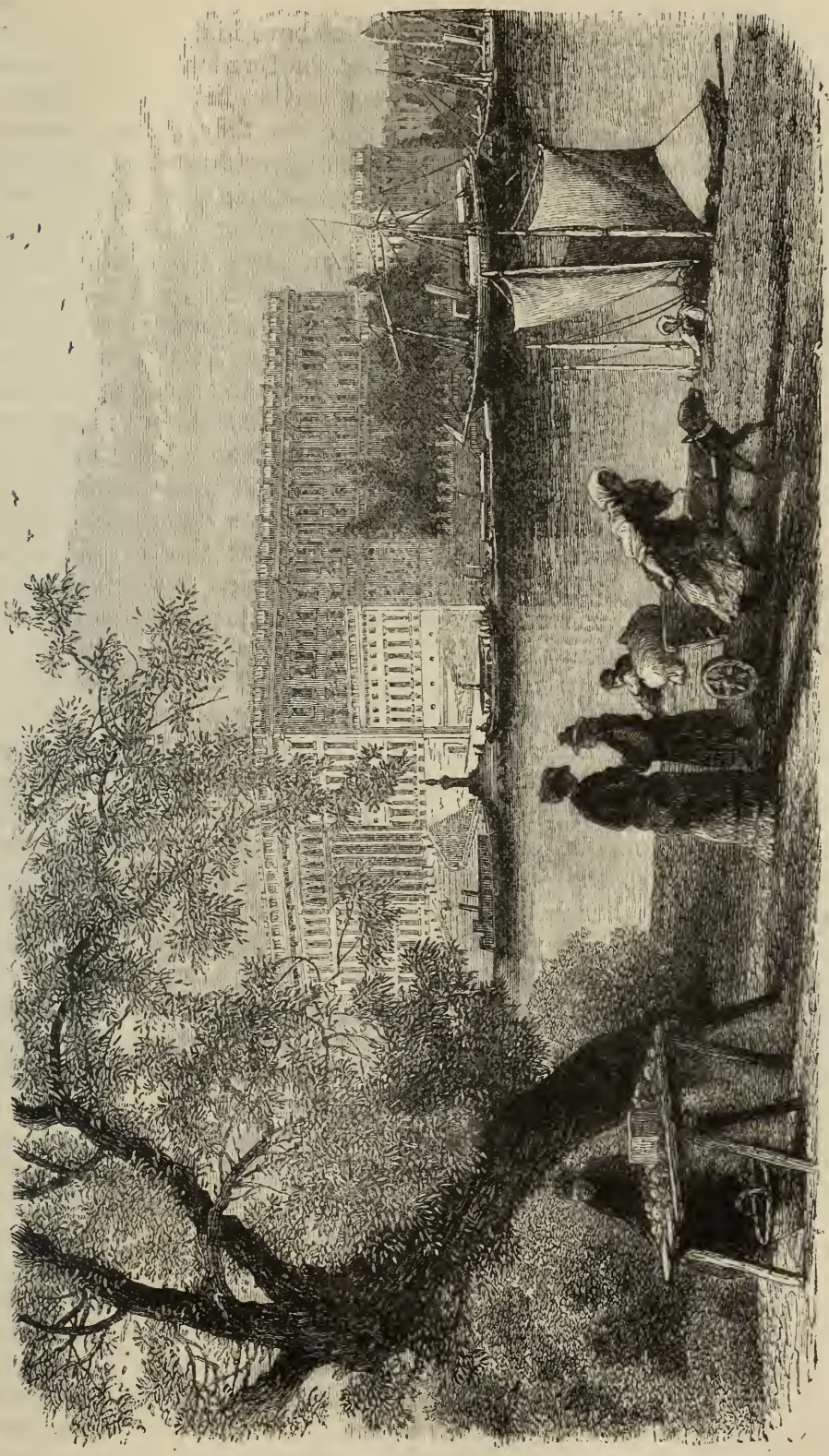
much less beautiful than the statues of Wisdom and Justice we had left in the hotel garden.

Within, the cathedral was large and somewhat imposing, but white and cold. The arches of the nave are supported by twenty-four pillars of fine proportions. The roof is beautiful and not spoilt. In the centre of the nave was a splendidly-carved oak pulpit, but the high old-fashioned pews over which it kept watch and ward were depressing to look upon. There are side chapels all round the cathedral, containing for the most part the tombs of great people. Broad daylight comes in through the unstained windows and gives them a chilling aspect. The pride of the building is the chapel immediately behind the choir containing the tomb of Gustavus Vasa, apparently more treasured than the shrine of the Great St. Eric. The chapel is hung round with paintings of different actions of his life, some of them difficult of interpretation. The king reclines in marble between his first two wives, and seems very much at peace with both. His third wife has a monument to herself on the left. She survived him more than half a century, and seems to belong to a later day and generation. The whole is guarded by wrought iron gates.



ROSENDAL, NEAR STOCKHOLM.

The silver shrine of St. Eric, the patron saint of Sweden, reposes to the right of the choir, enclosed in a crystal case guarded by silver bars. It is its chief ornament, and is treasured as reverently as the body of St. James at Santiago, though less superstitiously. At the west end of the church, the organ rears its magnificent head, a mixture of dark woodwork and silver pipes, which to-day, alas, were silent. Immediately beneath is a plain slab bearing the one word *Linnæus*. Here the great botanist reposes, and a chapel on the north side is dedicated to him. The tones of the organ were denied to us, but



STOCKHOLM.

if the dead can hear, Linnæus, in his quiet resting place must often rejoice in the strains that vibrate and echo above him in the long lone aisles and arches. But church music in Sweden is simple and uninteresting. The harmonies of chant and anthem which delight us in our own services are here unknown, for they are opposed to the Lutheran creed. At night, as the sun goes down and darkness falls, the shadows play at hide-and-seek, like spirits risen from their tombs.

Our lady verger did good duty for her truant husband. In her anxiety that we should see and understand everything, she interlarded her discourse with an occasional English word, followed by a pause which only made its obscurity more impressive. In the sacristy she proudly unveiled a collection of jewelled crowns and sceptres and gold and silver curiosities, all displayed at the enthronement of every new archbishop. These she assured us were priceless. They were certainly curious and ecclesiastical. Up a narrow staircase we followed, in blind faith, to a collection of ancient garments cunningly worked in jewels and coloured silks and gold and silver thread. Hung in cases, they looked ancient enough to have belonged to the first Archbishop, who seven hundred years ago and more had founded his see in Old Upsala, succeeding the Druids and the Pagans.

With these gorgeous impressions we left. The skilful exhibitor had reserved her grand effect to the last. Almost she resented our going up to take another look at St. Eric's silver, so well guarded in its crystal case. She accompanied us to the south doorway and pointed out St. Eric's well. Tradition says it flows from the very spot on which the Saint found his death. Nothing would shake her faith. There was the well as evidence—what could be clearer? Less reverent was her feeling for the small old church to the south-west of the cathedral, of yet greater antiquity. What beauty it may once have had has disappeared. Time in this instance has not been kind. Through the windows we could see the dark, high pews and cold white walls; next Sunday's hymns were marked in figures on the usual black board; there was absolutely nothing to repay the trouble of examination, and we left it in peace.

The Library, with its two hundred and fifty thousand volumes, and many thousand manuscripts was not yet open. We wandered upwards under the trees, to the old castle, which only grows more uninteresting as you approach it. The cannon might have been formidable in its day, but was so no longer. A boundless plain stretched out before us. The small, quaint church of Old Upsala could be seen in the distance. On the other side the castle, the country was dark and gloomy with forest lands. On cold winter nights the wind has it all its own way here, and perhaps mingles its roar with that of wild beasts lurking about with unkindly intentions. The town lay at our feet, taking life's rush and roar with infinite calm. One of our little steamers had disappeared, the other was getting up steam.

Beyond them were the works and forges we had passed yesterday. Far away we could trace the little river like a silver stream wending its way between the fields and long Dutch-like reaches of the open country.

The grey old castle was in the background, with a delapidated gateway and a great square courtyard. Flowers and other marks of civilisation in certain windows betrayed the portion dedicated to the Governor. Sounds of harmony, vocal and instrumental, vibrated upon the air. A nightingale, not of the feathered tribe, was declaiming with might and main "O Luce di Quest Anima." Possibly the sweet strains came from the Governor's Commander-in-chief—that power behind the throne greater than the throne itself—or from his more interesting and not less tyrannical cara figlia. There are chains and tyrannies from which one escapes by simply cutting the Gordian knot, and there are others which are a delight.

Altogether the place looked more domestic than military. Instead of sentries presenting arms, or helmeted knights coming forth on fiery steeds, there was nothing on the greensward more romantic than a couple of female servants beating carpets—certainly with a vigorous arm and a vengeance—and casting regretful sighs and languishing glances at the empty sentry boxes.

The hour struck for admission to the Library. We left the castle and the strains, gave a last look at the broad sweeping plains and the silver stream, went down and entered the large building. An appalling array of books, extremely rare and valuable, exceedingly interesting to anyone who had access to them. To mere birds of passage, the MSS. demanded more time and attention. Rarest and most prized was the Codex Argenteus, so called because it is written in letters of silver and gold on a purple ground. But the purple had lost much of its colour, and the letters were fading. It is a translation of the four gospels made in the 4th century by Bishop Ulfilus, and is said to have formed the basis of the Teutonic language. Amongst the MSS. were specimens of English, French and German prose writers: the MS. of Frithiof's Saga; letters of Hans Christian Andersen; songs of Bellmann; autograph letters of Kings and Emperors. All these made the visit an interesting reminiscence: these and the extreme courtesy of the librarians. We longed for more time, but could no more delay than we could bring back the authors of these imperishable thoughts. There is always more pain than pleasure in looking at the MSS. of the great dead and gone. Their lives have passed into the unseen, but the hands that traced the characters lie between us and the pages, and we hardly know whether that sigh was our own or came from the spirits that seem to fill the air with their influence.

Time and tide wait for no man. We were to leave Upsala to-day and much remained to be done. Especially to visit Old Upsala, whose interest dates back to days of Pagan history. It was a drive

of three or four miles, and the host of the Stadtshotellet had promised a conveyance for a certain hour. We found it awaiting our pleasure. An extraordinary turn out, something like a Victoria; a pair of horses strong enough to draw the library itself; a coachman in pipe-stick livery and silver buttons. Everything, including Jehu, was contemporary as to period: as far as we could judge about that of the deluge.

We started with a crash, awoke echoes in the quiet streets, as deserted to-day as they had been last night, passed through funny little squares and a market place, out into the open country. A strong East wind swept over the broad flat plains, bringing up a storm of sand. The cloud was so blinding that we almost gave in to the enemy and turned back. But perseverance surmounts sandstorms, and we guessed rather than saw the end approaching.

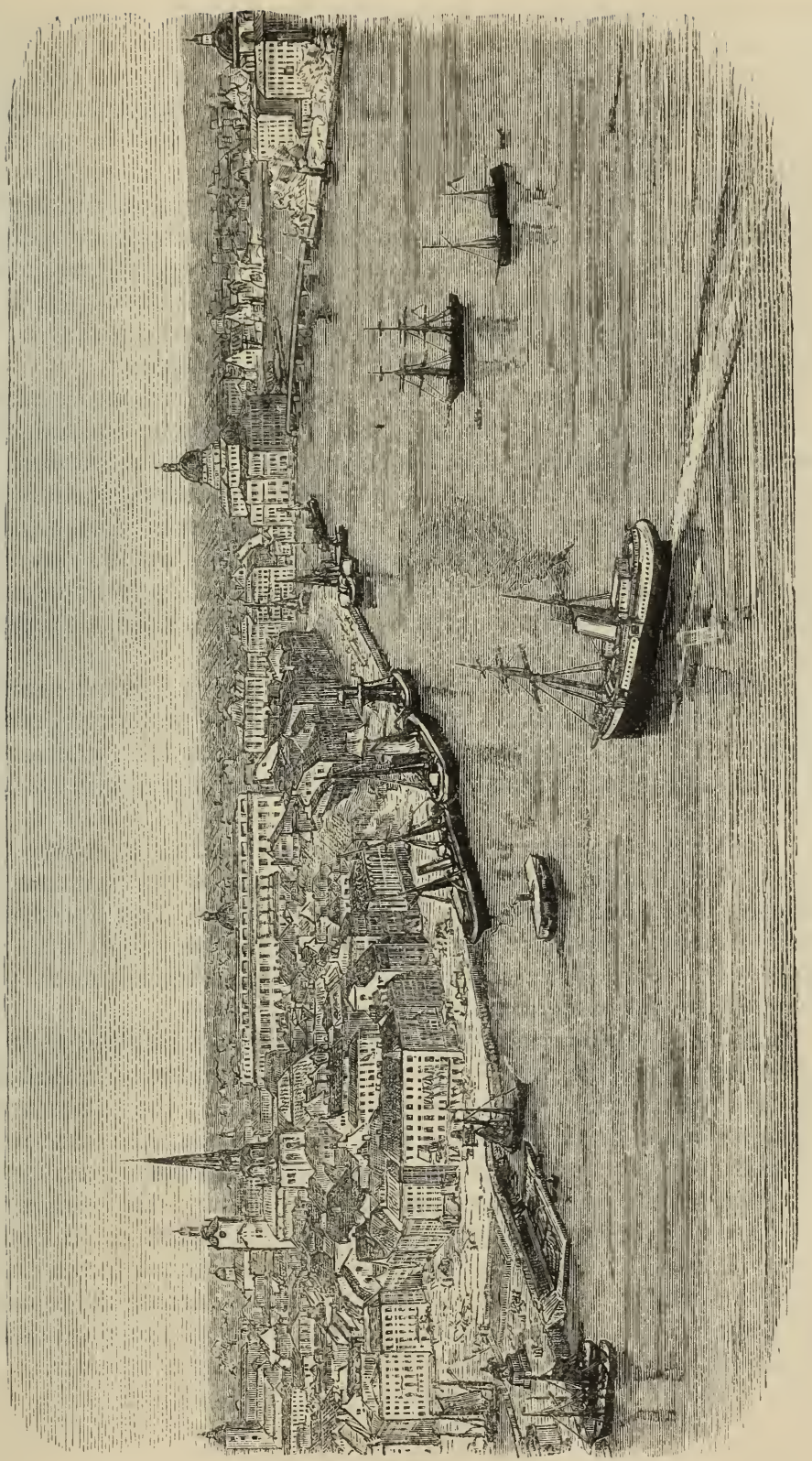
We thought we had had enough of this and would return by train. But the station was quiet and closed. The stationmaster was in his little house round the corner, in the bosom of his family, enjoying a luxurious leisure and a midday repast. It was no doubt necessary after his hard work: three trains a day and perhaps twice as many passengers coming and going. There would be another train in five hours, if we liked to wait. He was very civil and quite anxious and pressing. Five hours for a five minutes' journey. He did not in the least mean to be sarcastic, which made it all the more amusing. We thought we would risk another sandstorm.

The end of the drive justified the means. The church of Old Upsala was remarkable, not for beauty, but by reason of its antiquity. It was plain within and without; almost barnlike. A slanting roof, higher over the doorway than over the nave. Every stone bore the mysterious impression of age; carried you in spirit to days long past.

Perhaps some of its influence was borrowed from the singular mounds or tumuli that over-shadowed it. These date back to Pagan times. Tradition says they are the graves of Odin, Thor, and Frey, heathen gods then worshipped by the people. Old Upsala was the centre of this worship. It had a magnificent temple and sacred groves. From the trees victims might often be seen hanging in propitiatory sacrifice to these deities, who were supposed to love blood and cruelty. They were the Juggernauts of that age.

All traces of groves and temple have disappeared, as much as the people who worshipped and the rites they followed. But these tumuli remain, they will not crumble with age or pass away with time. The turf dies with Autumn and revives with Spring. Immense graves they might well be, rising sixty feet high in gradual slopes. There was a dark tone about them, gloomy and impressive. It was nothing more than the green of the grass, but it was a melancholy green, in harmony with the spell they threw over mind and feeling.

In the church the small organ was giving forth unearthly groans at



STOCKHOLM.

the hands of the organist. The blower was indolent, and every now and then let out the wind, and set all one's teeth on edge. The instrument might have been as old as the church itself, but time had not mellowed its tones. We escaped for our lives and returned to Jehu, who, outside the churchyard, possessed his soul in patience. To him all churches were alike; these tumuli were mere hills and undulations. If he thought of the buried gods it was only in heat of argument, when consigning his adversary to Coventry, or bidding him "Go to Odin." This is their way of using strong language; and they may have gifted Odin with horns and a cloven foot. We have our forms of strong language also, and they are not any better than the language one hears under those Northern Skies.

We left Old Upsala with its Pagan atmosphere and recollections. The visit had been full of interest, and should never be omitted. In returning we had the best of our enemy: the sand storm followed us. Once more we were under the shadow of the cathedral, in sound of its bells. These same bells told us that the moments were passing, and presently struck the farewell hour. The train would convey us back to Stockholm. A second edition of the canal, however pleasant, would have involved an extra day and disturbed sundry deep-laid plans.

The railway journey was pleasant also in its way. It ran through hills and valleys; sometimes gave one glimpses of yesterday's canal; nearer Stockholm, brought one in view of the Malar lake, intersected by fields and forests. Finally came the Capital itself, with its fine entrances.

In a strange country it is pleasant to come back to streets that have grown familiar. They give you a sense of rest; almost the welcome of an old friend, a well-known face. You know what lies at the end; the exact rooms awaiting you, the people who will greet you. The glad recognition with which officials mark your return is also not without its pleasures.

From the windows of the Grand Hotel the view looked more lively than ever; the water more sparkling, the boats more flashing; the constant stream of passengers more animated; the palace across the water more dignified and noble. Down under the shadow of the trees, beyond the museum and the bridge, an old woman kept a fruit stall on the very banks of the Malar. Round the corner was the crowd of masts, belonging to all the shipping that could not be seen. Beyond were the distant hills, that add so much to the charm of this wonderful view. Over all, gilding and gladdening all, rejoicing the heart far more than "a deep, deep draught of the good Rhine wine," was the glowing sunshine with the blue skies of summer.

THE PHANTOM OF THE LAKE.

By Edmund Mitchell, M.A.

MY profession is that of a barrister; but a comfortable private income and devoted love for the seclusion of my library have conduced to keep me out of the madding strife of the law courts.

My residence is in London; and when I am not in chambers, I am to be found almost certainly at Eastwood Hall, a dear old house lying in a beautifully wooded park within a few hours' journey from the Metropolis.

Eastwood was the home of my boyhood. Mrs. Armitage, who was then its mistress, was my aunt, but throughout my orphaned youth she was to me as a mother. Her two sons, though some ten years younger than myself, I always looked upon as my younger brothers, and as such loved them in my own quiet way. Their father, Colonel Armitage, after a long illness contracted during foreign service, had died when Charles was about three years old, and Norman was beginning to think about cutting his first tooth.

When the great sorrow of her husband's death fell upon Mrs. Armitage, I was only a boy myself. Unlike her own sons, however, I was old enough to realise what death meant; and the grief-stricken widow, her young married life blighted almost at its outset, turned to me for such sympathy and consolation as a boy can give. From that hour when the long expected end had come, and she flung her arms around my neck, sobbing as if her heart would break, a new bond of affection seemed to unite us. I have always thought that in the years that followed, something of her chastened sorrow passed into my life, making me thoughtful beyond my age. Be that as it may, as I grew towards manhood I came to be my aunt's adviser and counsellor in all matters relating to the boys and the property.

The years rolled by, the lads grew to man's estate, and Eastwood ceased to be my home. But my rooms were always kept ready for me at the Hall; and whenever I chose to make my appearance, there was awaiting me a warm welcome from my cousins and their mother.

Nor did I ever lose the position of family adviser. No step of any consequence was taken without my being consulted. Many a trivial little matter for discussion was made the excuse for a pressing invitation to run down to Eastwood, and was accepted by my conscience as a sufficient justification for breaking for a spell from my studies and literary work. I was unfettered by the trammels of wedlock; and was free at any moment to go whither my soul listed.

My mind often travels back to one special occasion on which I was bidden to Eastwood. My visit this time was for a good and sufficient reason. Charles's regiment was ordered rather unexpectedly to India,

and he had leave of a few brief days at home before sailing. Of course I had to be at once telegraphed for, as there were a hundred and one things to discuss and arrange.

My poor aunt was in great distress at the prospect of a long parting from her son. Charles himself was in high spirits. A soldier by birth and disposition, he longed for change and adventure. After three or four busy days, the hour of parting came, and on Charles's part no less than his mother's the farewell was a sad and affecting one.

Norman and I accompanied him to Portsmouth, and saw the *Malabar* sail. The two brothers were deeply attached, and poor Norman seemed afraid to open his lips, lest he should betray tears in his voice. There were love and gratitude in Charles's grasp as he wrung my hand for the last time. We watched the vessel steam away, the young soldier standing on the deck with his comrades, his hand again and again waving an adieu. Then we turned sadly away, our faces set homeward.

I accompanied Norman back to Eastwood, and remained there a few days, comforting the mother's anxious heart as best I could. At the end of a fortnight, when I went up to London, Mrs. Armitage had begun to speak cheerfully and hopefully of her absent boy.

Six months passed by, and Norman too had gone from the home nest, having entered the Diplomatic Service and become attached to a foreign Embassy. We heard regularly from Charles in India; he wrote long letters to his mother, and these, by previous arrangement, were sent by her to Norman, and by Norman to me. Thus we all had the full benefit of his news; and in return hardly a mail passed without each of us giving him a letter.

It was now midsummer—Charles had sailed early in the year. I had not been out of London for more than a month, and the weather was oppressively hot and sultry. For some days I had felt overcome with ennui, and disinclined for work of any kind.

At last, one morning when I looked forth, and saw that we were in for another baking day, I gave in; escaped from the hot streets and glaring pavements, and found myself speeding through green fields and over bubbling brooks towards Eastwood.

The warmest of welcomes awaited me. Now that both her sons were away, Mrs. Armitage felt her life dull and cheerless, and she was grateful when I announced my intention of staying with her for at least two or three weeks. Our tête-à-tête dinner that evening was a pleasant one: our conversation all in regard to the absent ones and their letters. An Indian mail was almost due, and the news it would bring was eagerly canvassed.

Shortly after ten o'clock we retired to rest. My rooms, on the ground floor, in one of the wings, had French windows opening on to the lawn. On reaching them, I flung the windows wide; and lighting a shaded lamp, set myself to read, with the cool night air caressing my forehead.

But somehow that night I could not fix my thoughts on my book. At last after one or two vain efforts, I rose, lit a cigar, turned down the lamp, and drawing the windows softly to behind me, sauntered forth into the park.

One of the great attractions of Eastwood is the lake; in breadth it at no point much exceeds a stone's throw, but, as it winds about, its length extends to beyond a mile.

From earliest boyhood the lake had been replete with memories of boating, fishing, swimming and skating. Thither that night I bent my footsteps, sauntering slowly along. A quarter of an hour sufficed to bring me to the wooded path that followed the windings of the water. At last I came to the boat-house, in front of which the lake was at its broadest. I seated myself on a bench; and having finished my cigar, gave myself up to the luxury of meditation.

The moonlight streamed upon the water, the surface where its silvery sheen fell in bright contrast to the dark shadows thrown by the trees and by the scattered shrub-clad islets. A balmy zephyr blew down the valley, faintly rustling the leaves and rippling the water at my feet.

Seated there, I felt like one of the Lotophagi of old, filled with perfect present bliss, forgetful of time past and unmindful of time to come. I heard the ripple of the water and the rustle of the leaves. I had the faint consciousness of the distant chiming of the clock in the village church tower. Ever and anon, also, the splash of a trout rising to a moth broke upon my ear; otherwise, not a sound invaded the perfect stillness of the night.

A full hour may have passed thus, when I was roused in a second from this state of half-dreaming trance. I leaned forward, eagerly listening.

It was a strange sound to hear on a midsummer night, yet my practised ear could liken it to nothing but the rhythmical ring of a skater sweeping in long curves over an ice-bound sheet of water.

The sound for a brief space faded without dying away. I had heard the same effect a hundred times before, when on winter nights I had outstripped Charles or Norman, and had waited for them at the boat-house until they rounded the bend some hundred yards farther up. As this thought flashed through my mind, the sound again gradually grew upon my ear, and now I could distinguish the sharp clang of the steel as it met the surface of the ice and the dull swish of the succeeding stroke.

Almost involuntarily I strained my eyes towards the bend, which was over-shadowed by lofty trees and bathed in inky blackness. My trained ear followed and interpreted every modulation of the sound, and my heart murmured, "Now, he is round."

At the same instant there shot out from the dark shadow on to the silvery surface of the moon-lit water what in all truth seemed to be the form of a skater advancing with rapid, bold sweeps. Fascinated

and for the moment dead to other thoughts, I watched every graceful movement. In a brief second the figure was almost abreast of the boat-house. There was a shadowy indistinctness about it, but it seemed that of a young man of noble bearing, wearing a broad-brimmed hat; a dark cloak closely muffled round him.

Soon the skater had shot up almost opposite to where I stood. Then, without warning, the arms were flung forward, there was a faint cry of alarm, and the figure seemed to sink into the water.

At the moment the boughs of the trees around me bent as if before the wind, and a wintry blast swept past me, whirling it almost seemed snow-flakes in my face, and chilling me to the bone. I was conscious of a succession of wavelets leaping up and dashing against the sides of the boat-house. Then all was still; and when I shook from me the feeling of horror that froze my very heart's blood, the soft balmy midsummer night breeze was playing upon my cheek, and the waters of the lake were rippling peacefully and almost imperceptibly at my feet.

So realistic had been the vision I had seen and the sounds I had heard, that my first impulse was to take a boat, and push out to where the figure disappeared. I rushed to the boat-house door, forgetting in my eagerness that it was always locked except when someone was rowing on the lake. When I realised that I could not get at the boats, I paused to reflect.

While my mind had never given the subject anything but casual and momentary attention, I had always refused belief in the so-called supernatural. I came now to realise, however, that this night I had seen something undreamed of before in my philosophy.

As I turned from the boat-house, and made my way homeward along the tree-lined path, I felt my blood still chilled with fear. I had always considered myself a fairly strong-minded man, and incapable of conjuring up imaginary alarms, but more than once I started at my own shadow, and it was with a feeling of relief that I regained my room.

My sleep that night was fitful and broken, and by seven o'clock I had risen worn out and unrefreshed. Breakfast at the Hall was at nine o'clock. About eight I strolled forth, to see if an hour's walk would restore my spirits.

For a moment I hesitated between the path by the lake and the avenue. I chose the latter.

I had reached the main gates, and was standing looking along the high-road, uncertain whether to retrace my footsteps or prolong my walk, when a gig drove up rapidly from the direction of the village. It soon reached the spot where I stood, and the man who was driving dropped the reins and jumped to the ground. I at once recognised the village postmaster. I saw that his face was pale, and then I caught a glimpse of an ominous yellow envelope in his hand.

"What is wrong, Mr. Scott?" I almost gasped.

"Thank heaven I've met you, Mr. Hawthorne. I took the message myself off the wire the moment I opened the office, and came straight here."

"What is it?"

And I took the envelope from his hand and tore it open.

The message was from Calcutta, and was very brief. It was addressed to Mrs. Armitage by one of Charles's brother-officers, and told her that her son had died from fever after a six hours' illness.

That was all. "Details by mail," were the closing words.

My heart sank within me. For one minute everything seemed to whirl round about me. Then I realised the terrible task that lay before me. In a few seconds I had made up my mind. I jumped into the gig beside Mr. Scott and he drove me rapidly into the village. I at once despatched this message to Norman in Paris :—"Come home at once ; let nothing delay you."

Then I got Scott to drive me back to the park gates. My last words to him were : "Remember, not a whisper of this must reach Mrs. Armitage till Mr. Norman's return. The secret meanwhile lies with you and me."

I was a little late for breakfast. Heaven knows how I got through the meal. I excused my absence of mind and my inability to converse on the plea of a sick headache. After rising from the table, I withdrew to my room, and eagerly consulted Bradshaw. I found that Norman could be here at six-thirty the next morning.

The day passed like a restless dream ; I moved about and spoke mechanically. I was afraid to shut myself up in my room, for I wanted to be near my aunt in order that I might guard against the bare possibility of the terrible news breaking on her unexpectedly.

I was thankful when night came, and she retired to rest. As for myself, the succeeding hours were spent in sleeplessly walking to and fro. How the night dragged its slow length along !

At last daylight broke. By five o'clock I was at the little roadside station. An hour later the kind-hearted postmaster joined me. He offered to apologise for coming, but—"You see, sir, I couldn't help it." His voice spoke his sympathy, and without one friend to consult I was grateful for his company.

The train arrived to the minute, and Norman sprang on to the platform. His face was pale and anxious.

"What is wrong, Harry?" he asked, eagerly. "Is it my mother?"

"No," I faltered.

"Charley then?"

In another moment he knew all.

We started for the Hall, Mr. Scott undertaking to look after the luggage. I took him to my own rooms, gaining admittance by the French windows, and no one in the house knew that Norman had come home.

By eight o'clock he had recovered from his first shock of grief and was

able to discuss with me the dreaded duty that awaited us, of breaking the news to his mother.

I will not attempt to describe the scene that followed. When Mrs. Armitage entered the breakfast parlour, my face must have told her that some terrible trouble had fallen amongst us. I faltered out Charles's name. Thank God, I had Norman at hand for her to fold to her heart. With him left, she had still someone to live for.

It was several months ere I ventured to speak to my aunt in regard to the vision I had seen on the lake the night before receiving the terrible news that Charles was dead. From the first the two events became associated in my mind, but I feared to mention the subject. But the day came when we could converse calmly and resignedly about him that was gone.

Then I learned for the first time the story of the Phantom of the Lake. It was based on a family legend that several generations back the youthful owner of Eastwood Hall had gone out to skate the very night before his marriage. It had been a severe winter, and the ice was perfectly safe, so that his friends did not seek to prevent his going, though no one felt inclined to accompany him. But on the lake that afternoon a portion of the ice had been broken to allow swimming room for the swans. No eye saw the accident; no one was at hand to render help. But next morning the body was found, and the young maiden who that day should have become a bride, lost her reason when she beheld her lover's lifeless form.

Hence grew the legend that never an Armitage dies a sudden or violent death but some member of the family sees the phantom skater on the ice, and hears his last bubbling cry across the waters.

Colonel Armitage had imparted the family story to his wife, and both agreed that it would be better to let the weird legend fade into oblivion. He himself had passed away after a long and lingering illness, and there was no report of any supernatural manifestation to mark the event. So the strange story had died out, carefully concealed by the one or two who knew it, and not till now had it reached my ears.

Well, time advanced with inaudible and noiseless step, and another five or six years rolled over our heads. Norman was rising in the Diplomatic Service, and bid fair to be a future statesman. Mrs. Armitage was still with us, and reigned as mistress of the Hall. I spent many months of each year with her.

Once again I was bidden to Eastwood in regard to a family matter of importance. Norman was coming home from Berlin to get married. He would start for England in about a fortnight's time.

The news was not unexpected, but it created quite a stir in the household. The next two weeks were spent in busy preparations for Norman's welcome home, and also for the event that was to follow when he would bring a bride to the old Hall.

Every arrangement had been made, and we were now expecting

his arrival almost hour by hour. His last letter had stated that he would leave at the earliest possible moment, but he could not say definitely to a day when he would be released from his post.

It was early Autumn, and the weather was close and sultry. The cool of the evening was the most enjoyable part of the day, and I loved to spend it on the lake, where there was nearly always a gentle breeze blowing down the valley. Not that the place was without saddest memories. I never found myself on the water but I thought of the fate of Charles. Many a time since then in the falling shades of night had I stooped and listened for the ring of the phantom skater speeding along the ice. I had never heard it again.

We had been all day on the tip-toe of expectancy, but the last train from London had arrived without bringing Norman. Having a number of important letters to write, soon after dinner I bade my aunt good-night, and withdrew to my rooms. It was ten o'clock before I had completed my work. Rather late for a row on the lake, I thought, but I felt fagged with the heat of the day and tired with writing. So I got the key of the boat-house, and started for the water-side.

Among the boats was a pretty racing gig, some twenty feet long. I got her out, and started for a good pull. Bending to my oars, I made the little craft fly through the water, leaving behind a long white track that sparkled in the bright gleam of the harvest moon.

I soon reached the head of the lake, and started on the home journey at a more leisurely stroke. When I had accomplished the distance, and just as I approached the boat-house I looked at my watch. It was ten minutes past eleven.

I was in the act of raising one oar to turn the gig round at right angles to the bank, so as to shoot her into the boat-house, when every muscle of my body seemed to become rigid.

There, away in the distance, borne faintly on the breeze, came the rhythmical ring of skates speeding over the ice!

I listened, frozen with horror. At times the sound died away, then rose again, and I seemed with my mind to follow the phantom skater as he rounded each bend or passed each clump of trees.

Now, however, the ring of the skates was sharp and clear, and on it came, nearer and nearer, mercilessly approaching.

At last the figure I had seen years before shot round the bend, and glided towards me along the glittering surface of the water.

For a moment I was paralysed. But, at last, mind and muscle acted together, and with one sweep of my still uplifted oar I turned the boat broadside to the lake, right in the way of the advancing figure.

I moved my lips, but for a time they refused to utter a sound. At last, with a supreme effort, I managed to shout out, "Holloa! holloa!"

I heard my voice echoing down the valley, and I hardly recognised its terror-stricken tones.

At the sound the speed with which the advancing figure advanced seemed to slacken, and I could hear the grinding sound that is caused by a skater endeavouring to stop when in full career.

Twenty yards from the boat the figure came to a standstill. "Holloa! holloa!" I again cried out, incapable of uttering any other sound.

For a moment the phantom gazed at me, my long boat barring his path; then he turned slowly round, and skated away in the direction whence he came. He disappeared round the bend, and the ring of the skates died away in the distance.

I cannot tell how I managed to get ashore. I knew where brandy was kept in the boat-house, but my trembling hand could hardly raise the glass to my lips. It was not for myself I feared. I thought of Norman.

Till break of day I watched in the boat-house, and listened with straining ear; but not again did the dreaded ring of the iron skates break upon the silence of the night. In the grey of the morning I slipped back to the Hall.

I changed my clothes, and endeavoured to calm myself. By six o'clock I was in the little village post-office, having roused Mr. Scott fully two hours before his time.

I telegraphed to Berlin, to Norman's address, to ascertain whether he had yet started for England, and sat down in a state of sickening agony and suspense, determined to await the reply.

Some fifteen minutes afterwards the clicking of the instrument showed that a message was on the wire. I started to my feet, never thinking that it was impossible for an answer from Berlin to have reached me yet.

"It won't be for you, sir," said Mr. Scott, advancing to the instrument. I pressed close behind him.

"Yes, it is, though," he cried, eagerly; then, after a moment, he added: "And it is from Mr. Norman."

The clicking of the instrument pierced my brain as the postmaster spelt out the message word by word. It was dated from Dover, and the hour of despatch was 1 a.m. It ran as follows: "Accident in the Channel. Don't be alarmed. Safe, and starting for home."

The message had lain in the London General Post-Office till the office at Eastwood had opened.

I seized my hat and rushed to the station. Norman might arrive by the morning train. Such indeed was the case. How fervently I thanked God in my heart when I saw him standing before me alive and well!

I soon got from him the outline of his story. He had reached Calais just a few minutes after the English packet had left. A tug-boat that had towed in a disabled vessel was, however, on the point of starting for Dover. He had at once accepted the offer of a passage, hoping that, after all, he might catch the mail train at Dover. When

the boat had almost reached its destination, a fog came on, and soon after they were run down by the very passenger steamer that Norman had missed. The smaller vessel foundered almost instantaneously, and, with the exception of Norman, all on board perished.

But the most remarkable part of his story was to come. He had not felt sleepy, and had remained on deck during the whole passage. He happened to look at his watch a few minutes before the accident happened. It was a quarter to eleven o'clock. A few minutes later he found himself struggling in the water for dear life. He saw the vessel that had run them down, her way hardly checked by the collision, fade into the misty darkness.

He thinks he was in the water quite half an hour. Hope had left him, he was numbed and almost senseless, when there reached his ear, borne through the billows of fog, a faint "Holloa! holloa!"

But, strangest of all, he thought that he recognised my voice—that it was I who was calling to him across the waters.

Nerved to make one more effort for life he struck out in the direction whence the cry came, and tried to articulate my name. But his numbed lips refused to speak.

Then again he heard my voice shouting "Holloa! holloa!" In vain he tried to answer.

He remembered nothing more till he found himself on board the mail packet, with someone by his side moistening his lips with brandy.

A boat had been launched from the steamer without a minute's delay after the accident, and it had come back through the fog to endeavour to rescue the ill-fated vessel's crew. No one, however, was seen but Norman, and, indeed, when he was saved the rescuing party had almost given up hope. They heard him splashing in the water, and reached him not a moment too soon. He was insensible when they got him on board. He was soon brought round, and was able to at once proceed to London.

My story was told to Norman and his mother, and to this day both of them hold that to me he owes his life.

Years have rolled by, and when I visit Eastwood little forms climb my knees, and childish voices bestow upon me the loving name "Uncle Harry." Mrs. Armitage, now descending into the vale of years—I myself have entered on the downward slope—always greets me with her blessing. Norman and his wife—the story has been told to her—are to me as brother and sister.

An artificially constructed island now marks the spot where in a bygone generation the young owner of Eastwood Hall came to his untimely end. But none of us ever refer to the legend of the Phantom of the Lake, and we endeavour, as far as possible, to forget its existence.

SUMPTUARY LAWS.

By M. G. Wightwick, Author of "Mrs. Carr's Companion."

I SUPPOSE it is an accepted fact that unrestrained luxury has always had a large share in the moral ruin of communities, and contributed more than anything else to the downfall of great nations.

The reader of history will recall to mind the luxurious prodigality which hastened the disastrous decline and fall of the great empires of Rome and Persia. He will think of that Sybarite self-indulgence which is a bye-word among us to this day, and of its issue in helplessness and ruin; nor are illustrations wanting in modern times where luxury and extravagance carried to immoderate extent have been the heralds of national decay.

> "Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

It is not surprising, therefore, that wise statesmen and rulers, warned by the page of history, have, from time to time, attempted to regulate private expenditure by laws, called Sumptuary Laws, from the Latin *sumptus*, expense.

The first of these was issued in Rome so early as B.C. 215, and followed by many others of a similar kind. In the reign of Tiberius, the Senate passed a law prohibiting the use of plate of "massy gold." This powerful body at the same time exercised its jurisdiction over wearing apparel, which was not thought beneath the consideration of so august an assembly. Men were forbidden to debase themselves with garments of silk, "fit only for women;" and it was left for the effeminate Heliogabalus, two hundred years after, to initiate its use among luxurious Romans. For in the early days of the Empire, silk was a rare novelty, and considered equal in value to gold, weight for weight.

The Rome which these sumptuary laws endeavoured to reform was the Rome where, a few years before, Lucullus had revelled, and caused that famous feast to be spread at a word in his Hall of Apollo, which, for its sumptuous profusion, is a wonder to this day. It was the Rome of a vicious luxury, revealed to us with life-like reality in the disentombed ruins of its sister-city of Pompeii, where the eating and drinking, the feasting and the revelry were stopped in mid-career by Vesuvius' molten breath.

Years went on, and in spite of the Senate, Oriental luxury little by little worked its insidious way through the links into the very heart of the Roman Empire, until the manhood of its citizens became paralysed, and the Mistress of the World fell an easy prey to her barbarian foes.

To this day the sable gondolas which glide over the waters of the Grand Canal bear witness to the strictness of the sumptuary laws which once governed the Republic of Venice. And other European states of modern times afford similar instances of less successful endeavours to suppress personal extravagance by law.

Some of the French Sovereigns did their utmost to combat the natural tendency of their subjects to vanity and display, whether on the table or the person. Charles VI., a prince of the house of Valois, issued a peremptory edict: "Let no man presume to treat with more than a soup and two dishes!" Earlier still, in the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, Philip the Fair (notorious as the persecutor of the Knights Templars) also attempted to regulate his subjects' expenses even to the minutest detail. Not only was the number of dishes restricted, both at fasts and feasts, but lest the law should be in any way evaded, each dish was limited to one kind of meat only.

The king's supervision also extended to the wardrobes of his subjects. No duke, count, or baron was to have more than four robes a year, the same number being permitted to their wives. Prelates, and knights for the most part, were limited to two, while every woman, whether single or married, whose annual income did not amount to the sum of 2000 livres was allowed but *one!* Imagine her Grace the Duchess or my Lady Countess of our own day submitting to have the number of her dresses limited by law!

But not only the number, even the very cut, colour, trimming, and price of these garments were arranged by royal decree.

Only persons of a certain rank were entitled to wear cloaks trimmed with fur, and the breadth of these borders, together with the quality of the fur or ermine, was to vary according to the different classes of nobility. The use of fur has indeed only become general within the last few centuries. It was not worn by the refined nations of antiquity, but as luxury gained ground in more modern times, princes began to make use of it for lining their tents. In the days of Philip the Fair, the size of a cape, the length of a lady's train was also determined by the rank of the wearer. Lined velvet caps were permitted only to kings, princes, and knights. Their cloaks were of scarlet or violet cloth, while those of meaner rank went clad in garments of more sober hue.

At times the sumptuary laws were very strictly enforced, and we hear of occasional instances in which overdressed ladies and gentlemen were seized at a ball and carried off to prison for setting the royal commands at defiance.

But of all classes of society the citizens suffered most from the harassing, if necessary, restrictions. Their *comforts*, as well as their superfluities, were suppressed by the jealous vigilance of the law. Not only were they and their households forbidden the privilege of wearing furs, jewels, or "crowns of gold and silver," but no citizen's wife was allowed to use the primitive two-wheeled vehicle which later developed

into the more comfortable coach, or carriage. She must ride behind her husband on the same horse when she did not go afoot; nor might she be lighted home through the streets at night with waxen torches in emulation of her betters. Doubtless in the reign of Philip the Fair, the different classes of society strove to tread upon each other's heels, much as they do now, and these apparently petty restrictions were devised to meet the occasion.

It is fair to say, however, that the King himself set an example of moderation and frugality. In these days the royal family wore gold and jewels but sparingly, and showed a praiseworthy simplicity in the furnishing and decoration of the royal table.

But neither example nor precept served to check the extravagance of our neighbours over the water. Luxury increased among them, and in the time of Henry IV.—the once simple, hardy King of Navarre—the taste for dress had reached an absurd height.

The wearing apparel of this period was profusely decorated with gold, silver, and jewels; and it is recorded of the King's favourite, Gabrielle d'Estrées, that when fully dressed she was so encumbered with finery that she could neither move nor stand! One is reminded of a French Court of later date, and of the new made Empress Josephine staggering under the magnificence of the splendid train which her unwilling sisters-in-law so negligently supported. Truly was that foreigner justified who wrote of France under the *Grand Monarque*: "La mode est le véritable démon qui tourmente cette nation!"

The love of display and senseless profusion which characterised the France of the Bourbons reappeared after a brief hiatus under the First Empire, being fostered by the lavish expenditure of the Court, and once more later in the palmy days of the Empress Eugénie. Many husbands and fathers of our own times have had reason to deplore that the extravagance and excessive variety of costume which she encouraged among her subjects should of late years have been wafted across the Channel to our more sober island.

Yet the English of olden time were not altogether guiltless of extravagance in the matter of food and apparel, as the sumptuary laws of our own sovereigns Edward III., Edward IV., Henry VIII., and Elizabeth can bear witness. Possibly the first of these princes may have taken a hint in law-making from the example of his maternal grandfather, the self-same French King, Philip, who gave these small details so much of his attention. As for our maiden Queen, she had herself the true feminine love for a large and varied wardrobe, but she did not countenance a like extravagance in her subjects. Even the dimensions of their ruffs were circumscribed by law, as the length of their shoes had been in previous reigns.

The days are gone by for interference of this kind with the liberties of the subject. No arbitrary distinction of dress or equipment now divides patrician from plebeian. In our streets and social gatherings to-day the wife of an alderman, of a merchant, of a judge, of a cotton

spinner is indistinguishable in outward adornments from a peeress of the realm. Her furs are as broad, her jewels as abundant and costly, the appointments of her table are arranged with, at least, an affectation of the same luxury. Only, alas! the "thing signified" by all this outward bravery, the inward grace of good breeding is sometimes found wanting, and still marks the difference between gentle and simple, formerly shown in the breadth of a trimming, the sparkle or absence of a jewel! Wealth, the great leveller, is allowed full scope, unlimited in its workings, by either Queen or Senate. No statesman would now dream of enforcing private economy by Act of Parliament. But it is worth while to consider whether in this respect our middle-classes—the chief offenders, now-a-days—may not wisely be a law to themselves.

The refinements, the comforts, unknown to our forefathers, but now brought within reach of the humblest, may lawfully be enjoyed as the fruits of a pleasant and wide spread civilization, but the veneer of would-be grandeur and incongruous display, with which we middle-class folk overlay the simplicity of everyday life might surely be dispensed with.

The true adorning of existence does not consist in "wearing of gold, or in putting on of apparel." Let us have the courage to cast off its superfluities, and so set an example to our inferiors in the social scale—of that honest simplicity and moderation which lie at the core of prosperity and a healthy national life.

SONNET.

Softly the thrush is piping from the thorn,
  While all the land is white and sweet with may,
  And far and wide clear cuckoo-calls ring gay
To greet the beauty of the year new born.
In the still night before the growing morn,
  Ere darkness brightens into early grey,
  Thou comest back to me as summer's ray,
Putting to flight the shadows of the dawn.
I see thy face, I hear thy gentle voice,
  And straight forget thy narrow grassy grave,
In thought of thy fair dwelling far from ill:
So that my soul in sorrow can rejoice,
  And out of weakness waxes strong and brave;
For in despite of Death, I hold thee still!

T. S. Cunningham.

DOCTOR EDITH.

EDITH VERINGDON had just attained to the dignity of an M.D. when, by two unexpected demises, she and her sister, Clarissa, became co-proprietors of the Veringdon estate and its magnificent rent-roll.

This unlooked-for occurrence naturally changed the tenor and the purpose of Edith's life. She had intended to live in a suburb of London, and to work hard. She had meant—after supplying the modest wants of Clarissa and herself, by practising among the wives and children of those gentlemen who should trust her skill—to consecrate her time and her profession to the needs of the poor. Now, however, such a life was impossible. The sisters repaired to Veringdon Hall, were received as one of the county families, and thought no more of making a livelihood.

"Now we can be comfortable," said Clarissa, with satisfaction. "I never really liked the idea of your going out in all weathers, Edith, to look after sick people, only I didn't see how else we could make both ends meet. But now we can enjoy ourselves, and give parties, and go to balls, and—marry, if we like. Only no one will ever be good enough for you, and no one will ever care to marry such a silly little thing as I am!" she added, with a sigh.

"I shall make the little north room by the hall-door into my surgery," remarked Edith, who had been thinking abstractedly, and had not heard a word of her sister's chatter.

"You must be mad, Edith!" screamed Clarissa. "People with £40,000 a-year don't want patients."

"The patients will want *me*, my dear."

"But, Edith!" gasped the younger sister, "when you are so rich!"

"I don't mean paying patients," said Edith, with a good-humoured smile, "I mean to devote myself to the poor. I shall institute regular hours for seeing them here, and I shall visit them at their own houses."

Clarissa said nothing, but she looked disappointed.

"You don't seem pleased, dear," proceeded Edith. "Surely you did not think I was going to abandon my noble profession, and throw away my education and study and toil, just because I am rich?"

"Yes, I did think so," replied Clarissa, piteously. "I thought you would have stayed at home, and we could have breakfast late, and talk about our partners, and read and work, and drive out in the afternoon, and dress alike in pretty colours! And now you will always be in your black dress and your umbrella, and I daresay I shall always be ill with fever, or something. I shall be laid up with

measles just as the County Ball is coming off, or I shall have the mumps when someone is going to give a picnic!"

"I hope not," said Edith, mildly. "I shall take every precaution, you may be sure. You will run no more risks than if we had gone to Richmond, as we intended."

"Of course you will do as you choose, Edith, but I don't like it and I never shall. Whenever I want you to go out with me there will be a patient to be seen. Whenever we have friends here you will be suddenly called away. Babies are always born in the middle of the night, and people always die at three o'clock in the morning, and I shall hate to be left in our corridor all by myself. It will be as bad as being married to a doctor!"

"I don't intend to go out at night as a general rule," returned Edith. "I shall only allow myself to be called out at odd times, on emergencies. And you can have Naylor to sleep in your dressing-room, and then you won't be alone, even if I should be called up every now and then."

"Naylor snores, and I couldn't bear her so near me," said Clarissa, pettishly. "I think you are very unkind, Edith, but I suppose it is no use trying to dissuade you."

So the matter dropped; and Miss Veringdon made her own plans, and devoted some hours of every day to the practice of her profession.

Clarissa hated her sister's employment, but she gave no outward signs of rebellion. She contented herself by entering a silent protest as often as occasion offered, and became skilful in innuendoes and home-thrusts. "I have *tried* to keep the pudding hot for you," she would say, significantly, when Edith came in late for luncheon. "I suppose," at another time, "it is useless my hoping you will be able to go with me to Dormer Court this afternoon?" Or, with a profound sigh: "Adrian Dormer proposed coming for some tennis to-day, but I was obliged to say I feared I should be alone and not able to entertain him. I begin to think I must set up a chaperon!"

Edith bore all these attacks very meekly. Cold luncheons and gossiping afternoons at Dormer Court were indeed indifferent to her, and the necessity for Clarissa having a chaperon soon disappeared. Adrian Dormer married Clarissa, and Edith began to breathe more freely, imagining that when the young couple returned from their honeymoon to take possession of the great east corridor, she would be at liberty to spend her time as she liked, and to devote herself more incessantly to her noble craft.

But she was mistaken. Her brother-in-law detested her profession even more heartily than did his wife, and though as Clarissa's lover he had refrained from expressing his opinion, as Clarissa's husband he left no stone unturned to bring Dr. Edith to a proper mind. In vain she argued; in vain she besought to be left alone. They stifled her with the bitterest objections. At last, in despair, she threatened to leave Veringdon, and to retire to Whitechapel or Seven Dials, where

she could pursue her avocations unmolested, and where, she said, she could be even more useful than she was in the country.

This declaration terminated the persecution. Clarissa dissolved into tears and said she could not be separated from her only sister, and Adrian was, perforce, silenced, not wishing to have it said that he had driven his sister-in-law from her own home. A semblance of harmony rested on Veringdon Hall. But inwardly Mr. and Mrs. Dormer fretted and fumed, and inwardly Miss Veringdon was chafed and irritated by the unspoken, but only too evident, disapproval of her brother and sister.

One afternoon—when this state of armed neutrality had been existing for some months—there was an accident in a hay-field through which Edith was passing. She hastened to the spot, and at once rendered the necessary services to the sufferer.

A stranger, who came up while she was thus engaged, looked on admiringly at the deftness and dexterity with which she arrested the dangerous bleeding, and bound up the wound.

"You have saved that man's life," he said, raising his hat, when the little affair was over and Edith had moved from the group of hay-makers.

She returned his salutation with a courteous inclination of the head.

"You will excuse the liberty I take in addressing you, when I tell you I am a physician," continued the stranger. "I came up, fancying something was amiss, and thinking my assistance might be needed. But I found I was not wanted. I cannot help expressing my admiration of your coolness and skill. You are no doubt a member of the St. John's Ambulance Society.

"No," said Edith, smiling.

"Ah! I daresay you are a hospital nurse," remarked the other glancing at her dress, which was extremely plain.

"No," she replied again.

They had reached a gate, and the other doctor darted forward to open it for her. Edith passed through, and did not resume the conversation. The other doctor stood hesitating.

"I was trying to find my way to Veringdon," he said, looking at her.

"I am going there myself, and shall be happy to show you the way," said Edith. "Unless you would prefer to walk more quickly? But the lanes and fields will puzzle you."

"I would much rather walk with you, if I may," said the other doctor. He admired Edith's handsome, intelligent face, and her simple, womanly manner, and he thought that a tête-à-tête walk with her could not but be agreeable. Moreover, he was curious to know how she had acquired her leech-craft, and he thought he might discover this during the walk. Accordingly, the two went together through scented hay-fields, where the dry hay was piled into cocks; over a tiny brooklet, spanned by a single plank, where the man-physician gallantly offered his hand to assist the lady-doctor; along paths by the

hedgerow, where dog-roses blushed and honey-suckle swung, and down green and shady-lanes, where the primrose-leaves were yellowing, and ragged-robin grew in masses of pink, and speedwell in clouds of blue.

For some time the conversation was desultory, though unceasing.

The two young doctors—for the stranger was scarcely thirty—chatted away very pleasantly, and with considerable cordiality. Both avoided professional topics; he, because it was his custom, she, because she was secretly enjoying the idea of telling her companion, when they parted, that he had been offering the greatest courtesies to the person whom of all others he detested, a lady-doctor.

But their talk became more confidential, and the physician began to speak of himself. Next to his profession, he said, he was most deeply interested in politics. He had been in India for some years, and he had come back to find England in convulsions, he did not know what would happen next.

"Yes, there is plenty of reform needed," said Edith, thinking of the vote she was not entitled to give.

"Reform! I think we have had reform enough," cried the young man, frowning. "The whole country appears to me to be demoralised."

"Do you think so? I think we have made very little progress since the Reform Bill of '32."

"What would you have more?" asked her companion.

"Well! a more extended suffrage, certainly."

"Would you give a vote to that hay-maker whom you set to rights so cleverly?"

"No, but I would give one—to myself."

The physician stared.

"Do you go in for woman's rights?" he said, slowly.

"No. I don't go in for them—I take them."

"Is that why you qualified yourself to attend to casualties?" he enquired.

"Partly. You don't disapprove, do you? You complimented me just now on my performance."

"I thought you did admirably."

"You are very generous. Some men can't bear women to do anything except house-keeping."

"I am not of that kind," he said. "I admire a cool head and a steady hand, wherever I see them."

"I am glad," said Edith, "that you don't think I stepped out of my province."

"Not at all!" he replied, eagerly. "I have often wished that more people had a little practical knowledge, and I rejoiced to hear of the St. John's Ambulance Society. But you say you don't belong to it?"

"It is a great pleasure to me to be useful," she said, evading a direct answer. "But everyone is not so kind as you are," she added,

with a sigh. "My brother and sister say I ought to leave these sorts of things to Mr. Smith, the medical practitioner of the neighbourhood."

"If you had waited for Mr. Smith, that poor hay-maker would have died," said the other doctor. "Arterial bleeding, as I daresay you are aware, leads to the gravest results if not immediately arrested."

"Yes, I know that," said Edith, with a slight smile.

"Of course a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," continued he, warningly. "I hope you don't carry your benevolence too far. I presume you don't think of superseding Mr. Smith?"

"I assure you I never go beyond my province," said Dr. Veringdon, with a vast assumption of humility. "Will you not believe me when I say that I have never offered advice when I have not been as qualified to give it as Mr. Smith?"

"Of course I believe you," he replied, readily. "No doubt, if you are interested in these things, reading and experience have made you able to manage simple cases of measles or rheumatism. A lady like yourself must be a blessing to her neighbourhood."

"I wish my sister and brother thought as you do," said Edith, sorrowfully. "They would like me to sit at home with my work, and only go out in search of amusement. They find great fault with me. They dislike my tastes."

"Are you a district visitor?" enquired the other doctor.

"No," returned Edith. "They would mind less if I were anything as orthodox. But I weary you—and here we part. Straight on is your way to Veringdon. Through this turnstile is my short cut to the Hall."

She had meant to pass through the gate, and, from that vantage-ground, to flash at him a last shot. "Good-bye," she had resolved to say, "Thank you for all your hints, but I, too, am a doctor!" But her mischievous design was frustrated.

"I am going to Veringdon Hall myself," said the stranger. I went to Dormer Court to see my old friend, Adrian, and they told me he was married and living here."

"Indeed!" said Dr. Edith, with some inward perturbation. "Pray let me make you welcome. I am Mrs. Dormer's sister."

After this, she made no further attempts to mystify her companion. He informed her that he was Adrian's old school-fellow, Guy Auckland, and that he had been in India for eight years; and she questioned him upon Indian climate, and Indian scenery, and Indian life, studiously avoiding all subjects which referred to their joint profession. He had begun to think her eccentric, but now he forgot that she was anything but handsome and clever. He found her delightful, and he was almost sorry when the walk ended.

Adrian welcomed his old friend joyfully. But when he heard in what way Auckland had made the acquaintance of his sister-in-law, he

was silent, and a momentary blank fell upon the little party. Then Auckland remembered Edith's sad complaints, and he felt sorry for her, and began to think it was a pity that such a fine woman should be unmarried. But neither Clarissa nor her husband divulged the secret of Edith's profession, and even when the two young men were left alone after dinner, Adrian confined himself to relating the story of his own marriage, and of the way in which his wife and her sister had become the co-heiresses of Veringdon.

"Miss Veringdon seems charming," observed Auckland. Whereupon, Adrian somewhat abruptly proposed that they should join the ladies.

When Auckland entered the drawing room, Edith was sitting at the open window, looking pensively out into the fragrant night, and Auckland thought that she did not look at all like a person who hankered after woman's rights. She was less severely attired than she had been in the afternoon. Her dress was open at the neck, and a pearl necklace rested on her fair throat. She wore diamond bracelets, and there was a flower in her bosom. Auckland had thought she looked well at dinner. Now, in the dim twilight, he thought her fascinating.

He went and stood opposite to her, looking down at her shining hair and intellectual countenance. Clarissa had gone upstairs to see her baby, and Adrian had stolen after her. The two doctors were alone.

"You seem to have a lovely place here, Miss Veringdon," remarked Auckland.

"Yes, it is a very fine old place," she assented. "And it was a very unforeseen accident which gave it to my sister and me. It seemed impossible that two lives, under fifty, should pass away, and leave us in possession. But so it was. It is rather sad."

"Were you fond of your relations?" asked Auckland, with sympathetic interest.

"Not in the least. I never saw the son, and the father but once. But their deaths have spoilt my life."

"How?"

"I have been obliged to alter all my purposes. It is right that I should live here and be idle, but it is a great disappointment to me that my education and training should have led to such small results. I deceived you this afternoon, Dr. Auckland, just for amusement. But perhaps Adrian has told you about me?"

"No. He has told me nothing, Miss Veringdon."

"Ah! Dr. Auckland, I have another title."

Guy Auckland experienced a sudden sensation of jealous alarm. The possibility of only one other title presented itself to him. Was she a married woman, with a husband in an asylum. He felt unnecessarily depressed.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Dr. Auckland," she answered, "I am qualified to call myself—Dr. Veringdon."

It was a great shock to him, and it was with difficulty that he contrived to gulp down his wrath and disgust. When he spoke again, his tone was piqued and somewhat sarcastic.

"I congratulate you," he said. But he could not yet bring himself to call her Dr. Veringdon.

"Thank you," she replied. "I ought to apologise for so wantonly tricking you this afternoon. I had no idea then that our acquaintance was likely to extend beyond a short walk."

He was silent. He was trying to remember if she had told him an untruth. But he could not bring this accusation against her. She had fenced with him, but she had told no falsehood. Moreover, she was perfectly feminine and lady-like. The revelation that she had made to him gave no valid reason for his ceasing to admire her. He had thought her sweet when he helped her over the tiny bridge, he had thought her brilliant at dinner, he had been struck by her placid demeanour and gentle voice when he had first entered the drawing-room, yet, now that he knew she was a doctor, she was repugnant to him! He felt outraged. He *ought* to have known; he ought not to have been thus taken in. True, he recollected that she had shown no manner of shrinking from the accident in the hay-field, he might have noticed that her behaviour was unnatural, but ——

"Dr. Auckland," said Edith, "I am afraid I have seriously offended you. I am so sorry."

"Oh! it does not in the least signify," he returned, loftily.

"Only, had you known it, you would not have deigned to converse with me," remarked she.

"Had I known you were a medical woman, I should not have ventured to address you," he said, stiffly.

"I wonder why you so dislike lady-doctors," said she, wistfully. "The women and children seem to find me a comfort."

Now Auckland did not precisely know why he did object. It was against his conservative principles that women should be doctors, but he had no well defined reason to urge against their becoming such. So he brought forward a very trite and not very relevant argument.

"Women have no business," he said, "to adopt any calling which precludes their marrying."

This was an old-fashioned idea, but perhaps it was a wily thrust. Possibly it was just as well that Auckland should know Dr. Veringdon's notions about marrying.

"When I embraced my profession," said Edith, "I had no idea of doing anything but make a livelihood for Clarissa and myself. I preferred the medical profession to that of a teacher, because I had always been interested in medical subjects, and I hoped it would enable me to do good."

'Ah!" said Auckland, somewhat mollified.

"And I never thought about marrying," proceeded she, calmly.

"Why not?" cried Auckland, crossly.

"When a girl is very poor, and has to work hard and dress badly, she does not think of marrying," said Edith, simply.

Auckland tried to picture the composed woman opposite to him working hard and dressing badly. But he could not succeed. Though her profession was odious to him, he began to think she was a superb creature.

"But there is no need now for you to work hard, or to dress badly," he said, softly.

"No," she admitted. And it was a great admission. It seemed to imply that she might even think of marrying, too.

Then tea was brought in, and Adrian and Clarissa came downstairs, and Edith went to the piano, and sang and played in a way which enchanted the other doctor exceedingly. He spent most of that night by turns praising Edith and vituperating her profession, and in wondering how it would be if two doctors were to wed. But before he went away the next morning he had recovered his equanimity, and went so far as to ask his sister-in-arms for a flower.

"May I not have a rose—Dr. Veringdon?" he said.

"There are plenty outside—Dr. Auckland," she replied.

"But won't you *give* me one, Dr. Veringdon?"

"*Miss* Veringdon will give you one," she said, emphatically, and she complied with his request.

When last I heard of Veringdon Hall, the two doctors had married and had taken up their quarters in the corresponding corridor to that inhabited by Mr. and Mrs. Dormer. Edith confines her practise principally to her own and Clarissa's nurseries. "My husband does all the work for us both," she says, "and he fancies he does it a hundred times better than it was done before." But the two doctors do not quarrel on that score. Dr. Auckland always pretends to ignore his wife's profession. Nevertheless, under the rose, he sometimes holds a consultation with her.

ON PILGRIMAGE.

Oft times on pilgrimage I go,
  There, in the shadow of the trees
  Which whisper to the passing breeze
The wondrous things they know;
  Yes, as the moments pass,
I trace, methinks, the footprints yet,
Where last my lady's feet were set
  Upon the waving grass.

There is for me my lady's shrine;
  Where I may dream that she is near,
  And, though my voice she cannot hear,
I yet may call her mine:
  The very leaves and flowers
Breathe of her presence, and her smile
Shines in the sunlight, as erewhile
  In golden bygone hours.

My lady's smile was passing sweet,
  My lady's voice was soft and low,
  When here I bent me, long ago,
In homage at her feet;
  Though we be far apart,
Yet oftentimes, 'neath sunny skies,
Still doth the laughter of her eyes
  Rejoice my longing heart.

So to my lady's shrine I wend,
  A faithful pilgrim; though unseen,
  Unheeded, by my lady queen,
My dearest, truest friend.
  In after days again,
So I be patient, I may tell
My love to her I love so well,
  Nor tell the tale in vain.

F. W. Grey.

In the Sweet June Twilight.

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THE

SUMMER NUMBER

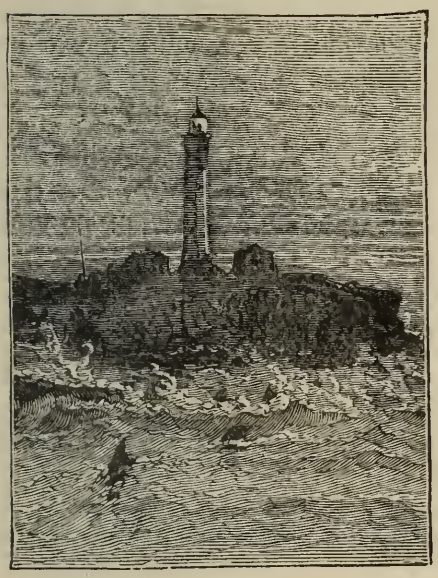
OF

THE ARGOSY.

THE LIGHTHOUSE ON THE SHALLOWS.

By Paul Cushing, Author of "A Woman with a Secret," etc.

I.



I AM a farmer, and live in the State of Maine. Farming does not pay in Maine, judging from my own experience. But I am not disappointed in the result, for I never expected that it would pay. I turned farmer because I had money enough to experiment, and had a passion for fingering a gun and a fishing rod, and never cared five cents for society.

I began farming a few years after I was married. My friends thought I was mad till they came down to see me one summer—a dozen of them in a four-horse waggonette. Then they agreed that I was inspired. From that day to this they have never ceased coming, in couples, in triplets, and in quartettes. They know I am glad to see them, and they say I treat them grandly. They are gentlemen, every man of them, and I take them at their word.

I have long thought that the great charm they have always found in the place lay chiefly in my wife. A grand woman—well, nothing will compare with her in the whole world. With your permission, courteous reader, my Miranda is a grand woman.

Her proper name is no more Miranda than mine is Ferdinand, but between ourselves we have borne no other name from the days of our romantic courtship. At that time I was not a farmer but an entomologist. As a lad I was fond of studying the beautiful

structures and curious habits of insects, so when I left Harvard College I went in for Entomology.

It was June. I had done a lot of hard work during the last six months and I thought a few weeks at the sea-side would do me good, so I packed a portmanteau and went up to Chatham.

I put up at Tower's Hotel, close to the water side. In the country it was my custom to sit with an open window and a bright light in order to attract insects. It was a capital way to collect specimens, and many a rare beauty have I captured in that way. I tried my plan here, but it did not work. If I had persevered I might perhaps have caught a sea-gull; as it was, I only caught a cold.

One afternoon I took a stroll through the main street of the town. I had no friends in the place and had begun to wonder why on earth I had ever come there. I decided that I would leave in the morning. I had just come to this conclusion when I found myself opposite a second-hand bookstall. As I drew near I noticed a person with a book in his hand, apparently reading. He was dressed in a rough, dark-blue flannel suit, and, somehow, smacked of the sea. I think I put him down as a skipper. I ran my eye over the books—worthless. Then I gave a glance at a tray of pamphlets—penny balderdash.

But stop! what is that? I make a grip at a pamphlet yellow with age, but complete and untorn, and I turn it over and over, and gaze upon it fondly, while my heart is thumping like a steam hammer with excitement. I looked round to see if I had been observed. The girl that waited on the stall was knitting, with her eyes on her work.

"How much for this old rigmarole?" I enquired, in as careless a tone as I could command.

"Five cents, if you please," was her answer.

I paid her five cents. My head swam. I had picked up a treasure. It was a copy of Volpone and the Alchemist, printed in Fleet Street A.D. MDCXIV. I would not have sold it on the spot for twenty-five dollars. To-day I would not sell it for twenty times that amount multiplied by twenty.

As I was turning away I accidentally jostled the skipper. I stepped back with an apology, our eyes met, an exclamation burst from each of us simultaneously, and hand grasped hand in a hearty shake.

"Why, Hale," I cried, "who would have thought it? How are you? Why, I haven't seen you since ——"

"Never mind when, Stanley; I remember the occasion, but wish to forget the date. I'm right down glad to see you, and I don't know another man in the world I would say as much to," said Hale slowly, his blue eyes fixed earnestly on mine.

As he spoke I began to remember that I had heard sundry odd things told about him from time to time.

"It is very good of you to say so, but it sounds a trifle misanthropical, doesn't it, Hale?"

He raised his eyebrows a little as he answered: "Maybe; I don't care to decide; too much trouble. Anyway I spoke truth. Are you staying here? Will you come down and see me?"

"I thought of leaving to-morrow," I said, hesitatingly.

"Then put it off for a day. Hire a boat in the morning and run over and see me. I live at the Shallows, you know."

"The Shallows; is that across the bay?" I enquired. He laughed for a moment.

"Oh, anybody will tell you. The boatmen all know me, and my house is pretty near the water. What time will you come?"

"Suppose I start at ten; how will that do?"

"Capitally. Sorry I'm in a bit of a hurry now. Good-bye, and do not be late; remember Stephen Hale, the Shallows," he said, smiling, as we shook hands and parted.

Although Hale was my senior by ten years, as a very young man I had been a close chum of his. There was some sort of a distant connection, I believe, between our families. His college career was very brilliant, and, if he had been a poor man instead of a rich one, the chances are that he would have struck a blow for fame and have hit the mark. I had not seen him for twelve years. He was married then, and had one little girl, I remembered. I had heard he had lost his wife, not by death, that would have been bearable, but by a shameful desertion. Then he seemed to disappear from view, and I had not heard of him through all these years.

II.

THE morning was perfectly cloudless, with a good breeze blowing from the land. There were any number of fishing-boats riding at anchor opposite the quay. I hailed an old fisherman and asked him if he knew the Shallows and Mr. Hale.

"Yes, sir," said he, touching his cap. "I know the Shallows and I know Stephen Hale. He keeps the Shallows lighthouse."

I felt decidedly at sea. It seemed incredible that Hale, a man of good family, large means, cultivated mind and refined tastes, should have transformed himself into a lighthouse keeper. Yet, on the other hand, why not? I had heard it said that since his troubles he had grown misanthropical. He had certainly chosen to isolate himself from the world, and what better place could he have selected for retirement than a lighthouse?

"Can you take me to the Shallows?" I said, abruptly.

"I'll land you on the steps in an hour, sir, with this breeze."

"Heave ho, then, and let's be gone."

We jumped into a dory, pulled out to the smack, hoisted sail, and went skimming down the bay as gracefully as a yacht.

At the head of the harbour, right out at sea and exposed to the fury and grandeur of the wild Atlantic, towered the white, round

column of the lighthouse. Below it, a dozen huge black heads of rocks stood out of the white-tipped waters. The lighthouse itself was on a high rock with about an acre of surface measurement. The sides were almost perpendicular except facing the open ocean, there the rock sloped somewhat, and ascent was made easy by a winding flight of steps hewn out of the rock. A ring of stunted fir trees surrounded the islet, and in a measure tamed its savage aspect.

We passed the lighthouse at racing speed, then we tacked and brought our craft as docile as an old tub right up against the steps.

I sprang ashore, and leaving my skipper whittling his black-jack, passed up the steps between two green wet walls of rock to the top of the island.

When I emerged I was astonished to find myself on a beautiful green lawn. The white tower rising in the centre made quite a striking picture. I turned round for a moment to take in the sea-view, and as I turned back I thought I saw a flutter of white petticoats vanish through the door of the lighthouse. "Perhaps it is his daughter. Curious place for a girl. I wonder how old she is," I was thinking, as I walked up the path, strewn with tiny white and pink sea-shells, that led to the entrance. I was about to raise the antique knocker upon the heavy, nail-studded door when Hale himself appeared.

"So you have found me out? Glad to see you. Come in!" he cried, heartily.

He led the way into an octagon-shaped room with a high ceiling, and lighted by four narrow lanceolate windows. They were so high up that only by standing and craning my neck could I see out of them. Each window was provided with a strong iron shutter, prettily painted, that could be closed tight with a screw. The room was somewhat large, and handsomely furnished. The furniture was of dark oak and very substantial, lined with the best leather. The floor was richly carpeted, and ornamented with a couple of leopard skins. I noticed several luxurious arm-chairs, a small book-case, an easel with a large sketch upon it, a pianoforte, a violin and a guitar. A few choice engravings hung up on the walls. Altogether a very cosy retreat, unlike the interior of any lighthouse I had ever seen.

"This is drawing-room and library in one. You see the wants of a genteel family are overlooked in an institution like this," Hale said with a smile.

"You have done much to repair the oversight," I answered.

"Thank you. We—I knock along as well as I can. I have only one other room downstairs besides the kitchen, and that like this is a combination room; morning room and dining room in one. You will stay to luncheon. I have ordered it for two o'clock, and that is a long way off yet."

As he spoke he pulled a bell-cord, and now a curious old darkie came in, bearing a silver tray which he deposited on the table, and

at a sign from his master retired. A bottle of Château Margaux, biscuits, cigars and some fruits were upon the tray. I hesitated to smoke in the room, remembering the flutter of white petticoats. Hale seemed to divine my thoughts. He lighted a cigar, remarking: "I believe in the law of compensation; it is worth something to be able to smoke in every nook of your den."

Of course I accepted the lighted match, and applied it.

"And so," I said, "it is really true; you do really live here?"

"You think it's an odd hole to invite a friend into? Well it is, but here I avoid mankind, and I am happy."

"But does it not look like throwing your life away? Anyone can manage a lighthouse."

"Did I not say I was happy? How many men could say as much? Better, I mean wiser, to run a lighthouse and be happy, than to run for President and not be happy. Isn't that philosophy?"

"Are you sure it is not selfishness?"

"I do not care to ask," he said, and his voice grew hard as he said it.

There was a short pause. I sipped my wine.

"Whom have I to think of save myself?" he asked, laughing.

"Are you alone then?" I enquired, with surprise.

"Oh, no; I have Pompey. I used to call him Caliban, but I was fool enough to teach him to read, and one day he got at 'The Tempest,' somehow, and read it. He blubbered and went on his knees, and begged me never to call him Caliban again, so I fell back upon his ancestral name, and now he is Pompey."

As he spoke there came up, as it were from the sea, a thin mist of mystery between us. I felt sure that he was trying to deceive me. Yet why on earth should he wish to keep me in ignorance that his daughter resided with him? The thought suddenly flashed across my mind, "Perhaps it is not his daughter." I had no right, no desire, to pry into his affairs, but I felt determined to find out, if possible, whether or not his daughter was with him. That, at least, was a pardonable curiosity.

"I should thing you find it dreary work playing Prospero without a Miranda," I said, venturesomely.

"I think I should find a dainty Ariel of some use, especially in the winter," he replied, carelessly.

"She is wonderfully like you," I said, with a sense of boldness.

I think he gave a little start, but, as I was hoping he would, I am not sure. Certainly there was surprise on his face, and in his voice as he enquired:

"Who is like me?"

"Miranda," I answered, with a very hollow laugh, as I pointed to a picture done in oil, that stood on the floor against the easel. It was the face of a young girl, glorious enough to have been the embodied dream of a poet, yet bearing the indefinable stamp of

having been done from life. An odd expression came into his face as his eyes rested upon the painting.

"I painted it; perhaps that is the reason. The artist, you know, is said to always put more or less of himself into his creation. If I have put my looks into that, my looks must be the best part of me I fancy," he said, with exquisite self-possession.

I felt positive that Hale was acting a part, but with such tact that my own love of truth seemed almost ill-bred.

"Yes," I replied, "I think she is wonderfully like you; that is why I called her—your daughter."

"Never mind; you must forgive an artist's egotism and a hermit's day dreams. Come and let me show you the place," he said, rising.

He led me round the tiny island, and up into the room where the lights were, and explained everything that needed explanation. We chatted a good deal about old times, but he was careful not to dissipate any of the mist that hung between us. But while I rattled on about my plans and purposes I was all the time looking out for another glimpse of white petticoats, and wondering if the lovely original of the painting was really shut up in this mysterious lighthouse. More than once as I looked at my companion, with his grand physique and proud, handsome, delicately-moulded features, I thought that he would be more imperious than Prospero himself. Also I thought that if there was a Miranda, and she fulfilled in soul the promise of her resplendent face, I would gladly become a "patient log-man" for her sake.

Once when I had fallen into deep thought upon the subject, and forgot to keep on talking, Hale said: "What are you thinking of, Stanley?"

I started. Had he read my thoughts? I felt my face grow hot as I saw the comical look in his eyes. I was on the point of making some kind of answer when suddenly, as though the earth had opened and let loose a spirit of song, there came up from below the sound of a girl's voice singing. It ceased as abruptly as it began, after a couple of bars. "She forgot herself, I suppose, but anyway she does exist; illusions do not sing," I thought, as I looked at Hale with a smile, almost expecting that now he would own up.

He looked angry, but not in the least disconcerted. We were in the observatory at the top of the building. Hale stepped to the top of the spiral stairway and blew a whistle.

"Well, Pompey, what is it?" he asked, as the ancient negro came puffing and blowing into the room.

"If you please, sah, luncheon is ready," replied Pompey, bowing and spreading his hands in an oriental style.

"Thank you. Say, Pompey, have you been taking singing lessons of any mermaid?"

I saw the old man cast a quick glance full of intelligence at his master. Then he looked at me, and then at the floor.

"Oh, Massa Hale, I'm berry, berry sorry. Hoped and prayed, sah, you hab not heard it. It was my gran'-daughter; she come from Chatham just to take a peep at old gran'father. But she's gone, Massa Hale; Pompey threatened to drown her if she ever made anudder noise on the rock. She went away crying, sah."

"You did quite right, Pompey. The less she or any other woman comes here the better it will be for you. You may go. I am glad it was not your own sweet voice I heard," added Hale, with a touch of scorn.

I felt that he was trying to throw dust in my eyes. I am sure I tried to shut my eyelids tight, but I am not sure now that some of the peck of dirt did not get under them. For who could believe that the brother of Caliban, the antiquated and infirm old darkie, was such an excellent liar and comedian?

"A little later we went down to luncheon. The dining-room would have pleased an artist, and the bill of fare a bon vivant, but I was depressed, and a little disgusted. Either there was no Miranda or Pompey was a most excellent actor. I think Hale must have guessed something had gone wrong, though of course he could not fathom my intense disappointment.

I left soon after we rose from the table. I was in the boat and Hale was standing on a step, close to the water, when he said: "So glad, old fellow, to have seen you. I suppose you leave Chatham soon, so that it is hard to say when we shall meet again? Come and see me when you are next in the neighbourhood."

"Thanks. Coming here to-day has somewhat disarranged my plans. I may not leave for a day or two. You may see me again for all I know," I cried, as we moved away.

I settled myself for a smoke and some quiet reflection. I smoked and reflected on my trip back, and while my pipe was sweeter than my thoughts and more soothing, I am sure that both did me much good. But for them I should never have done what I did. Of which the first thing was, I went to my hotel, paid my bill, and drove to the station. I concluded that by so doing, if Hale enquired for me at Tower's they would inform him I left by train. Then I drove back to another hotel, less pretentious and popular than Tower's but equally comfortable. Here I lay perdu for a day.

On the following morning, having arranged matters with a skipper, I set out for the lighthouse to pay a surprise visit. I felt convinced that by no other means should I ever catch another glimpse of those white, tempestuous petticoats.

We had not proceeded far when the skipper untied a bundle that lay at the bottom of the boat and handed me an oilskin suit, consisting of trousers, coat and hat. These I immediately donned, the trousers being large enough to slip over my own. "There, sir, if we met your own mother afloat she wouldn't know you for her son," exclaimed the skipper, with delight at the transformation. I knew

that there were excellent glasses at the Shallows, but I doubted there would be wit enough behind them to penetrate my disguise. Of course my only hope lay in landing before I was recognised.

We were not more than half a mile from the Shallows when to my horror I saw the lighthouse boat come round the rock and bear down towards us. In a few minutes Hale was within a hundred and fifty yards of us. I saw him raise a glass and my heart began to palpitate. I was sitting on the top of the little cabin at the front, pretending to be very busy with some lines and fishing tackle, and was careful to keep my head down and my face half averted. Presently Hale lowered his glass and held on his way for some distance, when he tacked and stood off across the bay.

In a short time we were once more moored at the foot of the steps in the rock.

III.

I CAST aside my oil-skin suit and sprang ashore.

There were two flights of steps leading to the top of the rock. The first flight was a short one, consisting of ten steps, running right up out of the water. Then there was a flat square of rock, of a dozen feet or so, and the second flight of steps ran at a right angle from the lower.

On arriving at this second flight I was amazed to find my way blocked by a heavy iron gate of great height. I had not noticed it on my first visit; yet there it was, and there it evidently had been for a long time, for it was green and brown with the water and the weather. I shook the gate, but in vain; it was locked and would not yield. Presently I spied a small chain by the gate that seemed to run right down from the top of the rock. It was unquestionably a bell-pull, and my first impulse was to pull it. I put out my hand, and as quickly I dropped it. Would Pompey open that gate to me? Or if he did, would he not first have immured the lady of the isle?

I looked at the lofty barrier of iron, and saw with a shiver that the top was crowned with a row of iron spikes branching out in every direction. The thing looked ugly, but I did not hesitate. I climbed the gate, surmounted those wicked spikes, lost my balance on the other side, and fell. The memory of my sensations at that moment makes me sick to this day, and yet, for the same after-rise, I would risk that fall again.

It took me some time, but eventually I discovered that I was not dead, nor stunned, and that none of my bones were broken. I nursed myself a bit on the wet steps, and then I rose and laughed, for that gate was at my back and not in my face. I ascended the steps till my head was almost on a line with the turf. Then I halted to get breath and, perhaps, a little more courage.

The locked gate convinced me that the flutter of white petticoats was not an optical illusion, but what was I going to encounter? I

lifted my foot to advance, and at the same instant a shadow caused me to look up. There, crouched upon hands and knees, was Pompey peering down at me, with a diabolical grin upon his face. My heart was in my mouth. I smiled faintly and said :

" Ha, Pompey, I didn't know you were there."

" No, sah, I don't 'spect you did. Nor did I know that you were there, sah, till I seed you," remarked the black warden of the rock, significantly.

I ignored his tone, and said, " Is your master in ? "

" No, sah ; when massa is at home de gate is open."

" Ah, yes, that reminds me ; why the dickens do you keep that gate locked ? "

" To keep out gentlemen, sah, that ain't welcome here, sah," answered Caliban's brother, severely.

Had he been young I should have chastised him ; but he was old, and his duty was to guard the place and not to be polite to interlopers.

" One would think it was a prison. Are you sure you have no pretty prisoner shut up here, Pompey ? "

I spoke jestingly, but Caliban's brother saw not the jest. He frowned, showed great yellow fangs as he parted his thick lips, and his black eyes glared angrily upon me. He did not make a pretty picture to look at.

" Come, don't get cross, Cali—Pompey. Tell me, who is she ? "

" Massa Hale is not at home. Go, sah."

" Sorry he is not in, but I hardly expected he would be. However, I can wait."

" No, sah ; massa not be back three, four, five hours. Massa locked the gate to keep you out."

" Oh ! then he expected me, did he ? "

" No, sah ; he thought you had left de town, but might come back again, soon. Please, sah, go."

" How can I when the gate is locked ? "

" De same way you came in, sah."

" How was that ? "

" Moses, sah, that what I can't understand."

" Well, Pompey, come down here and I will tell you."

He hesitated for a moment, scanned my face closely, and then rose and came down to where I stood, out of view from the lighthouse.

" Pompey," I said, holding his hand open, palm upwards, " I have a key that fits all locks, an oil that softens all hinges, a lever that opens all gates, be they wood or iron, or—flesh and blood. Would you like to see it ? "

His eyes twinkled as he answered, " Yes, sah."

" Then shut your eyes ! "

He obeyed. I pulled out a five dollar gold piece and laid the mysterious man-compelling metal in his hand.

"Now leave me. Say nothing to nobody; I wish to look at the sky alone; do you see?"

He gave one look at the coin, grinned, and like a magician spirited it out of his hand, whither I knew not. Then he shut his eyes tight, and, thrusting his face near to mine, said, "No, sah, I see nothing and nobody. You go, you stay, I see nothing, sah, I see nothing." Saying which he left me and went into the lighthouse.

As I lost sight of Pompey's figure it occurred to me that I was not a whit wiser than before as regarded the mysterious lady of the isle. What if there were no lady after all, and Pompey had tricked me?

The idea stung me like a nettle. Muttering something about only the brave deserve the fair, I cleared the few remaining steps and advanced boldly along the narrow, shell-strewn path towards the lighthouse. A few yards from the door a similar path branched off and ran round the other side of the tower. I think it was inspiration, veiled as timidity, that led me to follow this walk instead of going and knocking at the front door as I had purposed. Following it I soon found myself approaching the edge of the rock farthest from the house.

All around me was the rich, dark-green lawn, veined with pathways of pink shells. Between the firs that ringed the island were stretches of opalescent sea, with the hills behind Chatham in the background. I stood admiring the enchantment of the spot for quite a while before I saw, nestling right on the edge of the precipice a little to my right, a bower of lilacs and honeysuckles, which, ripened by the sun, forbade the sun to enter.

I looked at it, well pleased with the pretty, fragrant nest. And as I looked a wonderful thing happened. Through the meshes of that woodbine coverture I saw a figure rise and advance until it came and stood in the entrance. It was a girl, tall, lithe, straight as an arrow; her large, southern-looking hat, suspended by a blue ribbon, was hanging from her arm; a narrow band of the same colour bound her hair in soft wavelets on her forehead, and passing to the back of her head formed a loose loop through which her bright, golden hair fell like a royal robe over her shoulders to her knees. Her dress, a long, loose-fitting ornament, was in colour a creamy white; what it was made of was a mystery; not cotton, or linen, or wool, or satin, or silk, yet it looked like a magnificent old-world silk.

She stood fearless yet timid, with her hands clasped and pressed to her bosom, gazing at me in astonishment. I knew her in an instant. I had seen her splendid image and had called it Miranda. Yet, as she stood there in all her loveliness my heart melted within me and became as water. I had heard and read of such as she; they were the dead maidens of a grand dead world; but I had never hoped to see such an one. I had felt their sorcery on the printed page, in legend and ballad and romance. Ah! I had not wondered that wild men grew tame and soldiers into saints, having felt their sorcery. And

there she stood, a wild, startled thing of infinite grace and beauty, and I felt in that moment that my heart was no longer my own.

I raised my hat and bowed. She smiled and, coming forward gracefully and proudly, said: "I should not have come out, sir, but I saw you looking at me. I had been watching you for some minutes when you first looked towards the bower."

"I beg a thousand pardons. I—I had no right to intrude. I came to see your—Mr. Hale, but I will free you of my presence. Good-day," I stammered, bowing again, my face burning.

"Ah, if you go like that I shall wish you had not come," she said, looking me full in the face and bowing gravely, while her sweet voice grew sad.

"If you bid me I will gladly stay," I answered.

"Then I gladly bid you. You know my father?"

"Yes; very intimately years ago, when I was a boy; but we have not met for a long time, till a day or two ago."

"Are you Mr. Stanley?"

I bowed assent.

"I am very glad. My father spoke of you yesterday. He never spoke to me of any gentleman before, and you he praised."

"I cannot thank him enough for his kindness. I had a very pleasant time here the day before yesterday, but I did not know what I was missing in not seeing you!"

"Oh, I never see visitors! You are the first gentleman, the first man, I ever really saw since I was a child, except, of course, my father—and Pompey." She made this astounding confession with the frankness of a child. I looked at her in amazement.

"Do you really mean what you say?" I asked.

"Of course I do," she answered, laughing lightly.

"May I ask how long you have lived here?"

"Eleven years this summer, and I just remember coming; I was seven years old then."

"Well, but people are continually coming here, are they not?"

"Not many come; but when they do I always retire. My father, who has very few laws, laid it down as law that I should see no one."

"Yet you see me?" I said, perhaps ungallantly. A slight flush overspread her face. I was in an agony of remorse.

"Will you forgive me? I ought not to have said it."

She smiled for a moment, then her lovely face grew earnest as she said: "I do not think I am doing wrong. He praised you. Also he said that perhaps when you came again I should see you. Though I know he did not expect you to-day; he said you had gone!"

She turned her dark blue eyes upon me, and seemed to ask me if I thought she had been disobedient.

"I think you have done perfectly right," I answered, wondering if it was not all a dream.

"Then I am happy; you are a man, and you know better than I." And as she spoke, a subtle light seemed to break over her, and she looked the supreme embodiment of noble and happy girlhood.

"Will you tell me what your name is?" she asked, with a touch of what would have been coquetry in any other daughter of Eve.

"Charles James. Alas, they are not poetical, though they are royal. I do not like them. I would rather have been called Ferdinand," I said, looking at a sea-gull overhead.

"And I Miranda," she returned, with a rippling laugh.

"Is that your name?" I asked, with a foolish clutching at my heart.

"No; it is Beatrice!"

"Beatrice? I would my name were Benedick!"

"Do you read Shakespeare?" she quickly returned.

"Yes, Mademoiselle!"

"I am glad. But please do not call me Mademoiselle; call me Miranda."

"You will call me Ferdinand, then?"

"Yes. In Shakespeare I find that people marry a great deal: is it still the custom in the world——Ferdinand?"

I laughed: who could help it? And yet I trembled as I thought how easy it would be to disenchant her with the world, should she ever enter it.

"Yes, it is still the custom. I think a good old custom for those who love," I answered, gravely, with a ring in my voice that I had not intended.

"Are you married?" she asked.

"No; and I am very glad I am not!"

"But you will be some day, I suppose?"

"That depends!"

"On what?"

"Not on finding the right girl, but on getting her consent to marry me," I said, looking her straight in the eyes. She met my glance frankly for a few seconds, then she dropped her eyes, and a faint, delicious blush overspread her face.

"There is a seat in there," she said. "Will you not bring it out and let us sit down?"

I sprang into the bower, brought out the garden bench, and seated myself beside her. I set myself to find out what she knew, and the result was surprising. She spoke Spanish and French with fluency and elegance, and, though she stumbled prettily over German, I discovered that she was well acquainted with Goethe, and Lessing, and Heine. In her own language, she had not read much, outside of Shakespeare, the Elizabethan dramatists, Chaucer, Spencer, Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Milton, Izaak Walton, Hooker, Jeremy Taylor and Southey's "Doctor." It was curious how enthusiastic she was over that quaint, delightful, topsy-turvy book, "The Doctor."

It was comical at times what odd ideas she had of the world and its ways. It was like talking to one who had been born an adult, with a small stock of rare old-world knowledge, an excellent judgment, a shrewd wit, a high spirit, and with no more experience than a little child. The full effect is indescribable.

One thing surprised me greatly: she was lacking in no part of that strange quality which in women we vaguely call charm. She was so surpassingly lovely in face and form, so human, that I had never felt the influence of sex as I felt it that summer morning.

I suppose we had been talking full two hours, and had grown quite intimate and confidential, and, though I had guarded my words, I had drunk greedily of the wine of love, when suddenly Pompey came upon the scene, with terror visible in every lineament of his face. We both sprang to our feet.

"Oh, Miss Beate, Miss Beate, what Pompey do? Massa Hale is comin' round de rock. Oh, Miss Beate, Miss Beate," cried Pompey, wringing his hands and twisting his body in a wretched manner.

No, I was not afraid; still, it was, I felt, very awkward. I looked at Miranda; she smiled, yet she was pale, and there was a new light in her eyes.

"You had better go in," I said, taking her hand.

"Yah, Miss Beate!"

"Silence, Pompey," she said proudly. Then to me, softly: "Do you think so? Then I will go. We shall meet again; I shall tell my father it is my wish." And before I could make a reply, she was gone.

"Oh, sah, if you care for de dear young lady you will not let Massa Hale see you, sah," cried Pompey, dolefully.

"Well, I daresay I can get away before he comes round; my boat is waiting below," I answered, moving away.

"Stop, sah; no, sah, it ain't. I sent de man away when I see massa coming."

"The deuce, you did; then what am I to do?"

"Hide, sah; please hide, sah, till Pompey can get you away."

I shrugged my shoulders. It did not suit me to hide.

"If you loved Miss Beate you would hide for her sake, sah," said Pompey, with an awful solemnity.

I hesitated a moment ere I said, "If you can hide me, then do so."

Instantly the old man seized my hand and kissed it. "Follow me, sah," he said, quickly, and, hoping she was not watching me, I followed him.

Pompey made his way to the other side of the bower. Here, for a short distance, there was a gentle dip of the land down to the edge of the rock, forty feet below which was the eternal roar of the surge. Half-way down the dip, and sheltered from the coldest winds, was a thick clump of bushes. Pompey held a mass of this growth back, and thereby revealed a large hole running into the rock.

"Go in, sah, and Pompey will follow you, sah."

"Hang it, man, I am not a rabbit or a fox!"

"Oh, sah, plenty of room, sah, when you get in."

I went down on my hands and knees and crawled in. I had not gone more than a dozen feet or so, when suddenly the narrow tunnel expanded into a gallery, eight or ten feet high, and wide enough for two persons to walk abreast. It seemed to run right ahead into the heart of the rock. In a moment or two I was rejoined by Pompey.

"Wait a minute, sah," he said, proceeding to light a wee taper. "It ain't really dark, sah, when you get used to it. Come on, sah."

I was getting interested. We went forward, perhaps twenty yards; then Pompey stopped and pointed down. A black chasm yawned in front of us, at our very feet. I started and drew back. Pompey laughed. He advanced to the brink and began to gradually disappear downwards, holding the light above his head. I saw his fangs, the white of his eyes, his black grinning visage, and I thought he was an imp of darkness returning home.

"Come on, sah," he shouted, gleefully, and I had not the moral courage to refuse. Drawing close to the edge I saw that a ladder was fixed against the side, and held by a couple of iron hooks at the top, that looked anything but a supernatural means of descent. So commending myself to my stars I followed Pompey.

I counted the rungs in the ladder; there were twenty-two. At the bottom I found myself in a large chamber in which were a number of coloured stalactites, several of which almost reached the ground, and produced the effect of fantastic pillars supporting the roof. From one of these projected a natural formation, in the shape of a candelabra. In this were stuck four huge tapers which Pompey proceeded to light.

"Now, sah, if you stay here till the coast is clear, Miss Beate will never forget you."

"Well, this is an interesting hole and no mistake. Are there any traps or dangers in it?"

"No, sah; you can look round the room and find it dry and snug and safe, sah; safe."

"All right, but hurry up. Too much of this thing wouldn't be pleasant. Don't be more than an hour anyway."

"No, sah; make yourself comfortable, sah." And with a grin Pompey left me and ascended the ladder.

"Anyhow I can find my way out again easy enough," I thought as I watched the light in Pompey's hand rise higher and higher. There was a moment of dead silence, and then, "Good heavens, he is taking away the ladder. Pompey, Pompey," I yelled, rushing to the descent. "Don't take that ladder. Do you hear? Bring that ladder back," I roared, as I saw the last few feet of the ladder disappear at the top.

"All right, sah, but Massa Hale may come and look for it. Pom-

pey hide it, sah; hide it safe, sah," responded Pompey, his voice sounding farther and farther away.

"Idiot, Pompey, idiot, come back, I say!" I thought I heard a distant chuckle, and that was all. I was alive and alone, and shut up in the heart of a rock.

IV.

I SHOULD not like to have to state my sensations and emotions during the first few hours of my imprisonment in the cave. The first thing I did, when all sound of Pompey's presence had died away, was to return to the illuminated stalactite and look at my watch.

It was just half past two. I wound up my watch, and in replacing it in my vest pocket, I felt a coin. I pulled it out and found it was a five dollar gold piece. This surprised me. I opened my purse and saw in it two similar pieces, besides some greenbacks. Now, when I left Chatham, I was prepared to affirm that I had three five dollar gold pieces on me, no more and no less. I had given Pompey one, and two were in my purse—where had the one in my vest pocket come from? I was not accustomed to finding gold coins in stray corners of my pockets.

I puzzled over the matter, and at last I came to the conclusion that Pompey, Caliban's brother, in addition to his other virtues, was also a bit of a conjurer, and had spirited back the price of his treachery. What this meant, whether it meant that he was incorruptible, or a coward, or a repentant knave, was more than I could make out.

I thought the best thing I could do to employ my time till he came to release me, was to explore my prison. I seized one of the huge tapers and went all round the room. In doing so, I kept coming across tapers stuck all over the walls and in the columns, in fifty places. I lit them one by one as I came to them, then I counted them, and found there were just three hundred and sixty-five.

"That is one a day for a year. Fancy living here for a year," I said aloud, for I knew that I was alone, and I wanted to hear how my voice sounded. Another idea suggested itself as I looked at the lights, and I shuddered. "No, no, he dare not do it. I am getting frightened, I believe," I muttered, giving my attention once more to the room.

It was almost circular, about forty feet in diameter and twenty in height. The walls were of red and white and blue rock, while the fantastic stalactites, of which there were no less than seven, seemed to embody all the colours of the prism. The place was flooded with light, and the effect was strikingly beautiful.

Four of the stalactites, almost in the centre of the room, formed a rude semi-circle, and in front of these, on the bare, dry rock, were stretched three large Persian rugs. On these were placed an arm-chair, low couch, table, pipes, tobacco, cigars, several wines and

spirits, and a pile of books. On the other side of this crescent of stalactites were two more rugs, a brass bedstead with bed freshly made, and in short a complete bed-room equipment. The place was well stocked, well kept, and evidently well used. I thought as I looked around that I should not mind spending a night there, and decided to ask Hale to let me do so at some future time.

After some time I sat down, and naturally I looked at the wine and the tobacco. They were not mine, to be sure, but they would heighten the total effect, I thought. It was a pleasant temptation and I allowed it to linger awhile, like a delicate flavour in the mouth. Then I uncorked a bottle, and lighted a pipe and lay down, and, as it were, allowed the romance of the thing to have its way.

Presently, feeling a bit drowsy I laid my pipe aside and fell asleep. I awoke with a start, and jumping up, looked at my watch and was astounded to find that it had just turned six. I must have slept nearly three hours. I began to walk about, wondering why on earth Pompey did not come.

Approaching the entrance I saw a small basket on the ground, and as I stooped to examine it, I found that it was held by a thin string fastened somewhere above, probably on one of the iron staples that had held the ladder.

I opened the basket, and my heart sank—it was full of edibles. Nevertheless the contents, done up in snowy table-linen, looked so toothsome that I proceeded to bring them forth. They consisted of a couple of boiled eggs, some cold chicken and ham, half a dozen doughnuts reinforced with a troop of buckwheat cakes and pop-overs, a bottle of olives and a can of milk. There was also a supply of china-ware, cutlery, and three wine glasses. These last I construed as a carte blanche as concerned the wines.

After all I began to feel grateful to Pompey for his consideration. The things were too good to be wasted, and as I did not know how many hours I might yet have to wait, I spread my lonely table and made a capital meal. That finished, I repacked the basket, extinguished three hundred of the lights, which left the most distant points of the room in semi-obscurity, and sat down to read and smoke. The evening passed pleasantly and rapidly, and I was surprised to find that it was midnight.

I gave up all hope of Pompey coming before morning, and having made another examination of the bed, and found everything sweet and clean, I undressed and, like a philosopher, went in for a good night's rest, and got it.

The next morning I was up early, and had been dressed a full hour before Pompey came at seven o'clock.

The first notice I had of his presence was a slight noise caused by the basket as he was drawing it up. I sprang to the entrance and looked up. Pompey was unfastening the lid of the basket, his uncanny visage lighted up by the flare of a taper stuck in the rock.

"This is a fine trick you have played me, and no mistake. How much longer am I to stay here, pray?" I exclaimed in an ironical tone.

"Good morning, sah. Bootiful lubly morning, sah. Sorry, sah, to keep you in so long, sah, but de coast is not clear—foggy, sah, foggy," said the old man with a chuckle.

"Foggy or clear, I must get out of this soon. Give me the ladder down."

"Look out, sah; here's some breakfast, sah," cried Pompey, lowering the basket as he spoke. I felt inclined to kick it as it lay at my feet.

"Thank you, but I am not hungry. Do you hear, Pompey? Put that ladder down," I said, angrily.

"Please, sah, Massa Hale sent his com'liments and wants to know if you will give him your word of honour to have no more words with Miss Beate?"

"What did you say?"

Pompey repeated his words.

"And what if I give it him?"

"Then I am to put down de ladder."

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then I am not to put down de ladder."

"What? He will keep me a prisoner?"

"Yes, sah."

"The deuce he will; then I refuse."

"Thank you, sah; Pompey knowed you would, sah," and with a chuckle of delight, Caliban's brother seized the taper and made off.

Then I looked at the basket, and thought I detected sundry grateful odours issuing from it, and wishing to put my olfactory organ to the proof, I emptied it. Oh, the delicious cakes and rolls, coffee and cream, cutlets and potatoes. They seemed to murmur gently, blending their voices with the soft mellow thunder of the sea: "Eat me, drink me; eat me, drink me." My worst enemy never said that I was hard-hearted: I eat and drank.

Then I lit a pipe and looked at the situation. Was Hale mad? Was he playing me a practical joke? Could I get out without the ladder? If I turned obstinate how long would he dare to keep me there? If my friends became alarmed and sought me, could they ever find me? If I promised what he wanted, was I morally bound to keep my word? Was I prepared to pass my word? If not, why not? Did I care ten cents, five cents for Miranda? Did I then really love her? Was there not at the bottom as much pride and anger as love in my determination?

Here I found myself, so to speak, with my head against a stone wall. I rose and began to walk for exercise. My tapers were burning low, I noticed, so I replaced them with fifty fresh ones.

"It will cost him a pretty penny," I thought aloud, "for my

entertainment. But then he must be rolling up dollars at a fine rate. He can't be spending a tithe of his income!"

In the course of my exercise I discovered the secret of the excellent ventilation of the place, which consisted of two deep and narrow fissures in the roof, which ran slanting right through the rock and let in light enough to make themselves visible. In addition to these, there was the entrance, besides several cleavages in the side nearest the edge of the island. Two of these cleavages, not more than three inches wide, were so smooth and straight that I could see the sky at the other end—a wee strip of blue.

At twelve o'clock Pompey came with a light lunch and a gallon of fresh water. I put a question to him, but he did not answer or speak, simply grinned and chuckled and went away.

The hours that elapsed before he appeared again with dinner were the most wretched I ever spent in my life. I realised for the first and last time that it is not stone walls that do a prison make, but thoughts and feelings. Time seemed to have lost its nimbleness, and the hours dragged their weary length along at a snail's pace. I found myself listening feverishly for the coming of Pompey.

He came at last with as dainty a dinner as any epicure could have wished. This time I was on my dignity, and though I was burning to talk, I had made up my mind to keep perfect silence. I thought Pompey was going away without saying a word, when suddenly he called out: "Massa Stanley, please, sah."

At the sound of his voice my resolution melted away.

"Well, what is it?" I answered curtly.

"Please, sah, Massa Hale sends his com'liments and wants to know if you will give him your word of honour to have no more words with Miss Beate?"

I broke out into a fierce laugh. "Give my 'com'liments' to 'Massa' Hale and tell him to go to the deuce!"

"Yes, sah; I will, sah," replied Pompey, retiring apparently in great glee.

After dinner I took to the wine. I chose some Johannesberg, and it did me good, sent the blues a-flying, and infused into me the noble sentiment that I was monarch of all I surveyed.

Next morning I was not up when breakfast came, and was, indeed, only awakened by the sound of Pompey's sweet voice. I caught only the fag end of the formula—"Word of honour to have no more words with Miss Beate."

"I thought I gave your master his directions last night?" I roared, at the top of my voice.

"Yes, sah; you did, sah; don't let your breakfast get cold, sah."

After breakfast I lighted fifty new tapers, made my bed, and did the general housework. My spirits had not fallen, though every trace of Johannesberg had vanished. I was light-hearted, happy as a lark, sang and whistled, and was amazed how the time had gone,

when Pompey came with lunch. He seemed in a great hurry, and was come and gone in no time.

I spent most of the afternoon watching a spider weave its web between two of the tapers on a stalactite. It was the only living thing to be seen, and I moved about very carefully, so as not to disturb or frighten it.

Towards evening I heard what seemed a great noise outside; it sounded like pickaxe and shovel. Were they fastening up the entrance? On reflection I considered it was more likely that they were enlarging it. After a while there was a sound as of a heavy body being dragged along the gallery. I did not know what I had to fear, and yet I was afraid. I think this must have been the effect of solitude. I sat quite still, smoking slowly, with my eyes fixed intently on the ascent. Something was being lowered into the cave. My heart seemed to stand still for a moment as a monstrous object came slowly into view; then I sprang up, with an exclamation of delight—*it was my portmanteau.*

At the same instant Pompey's angelic voice filled my ears.

"Please, sah, Massa Hale thought you might need your trunk, sah. Dinner soon, sah. Please, sah, will you unhitch de rope, sah."

I went forward, unfastened the cord, and was stepping back, unwilling to utter my thanks, when an idea seized me. I sprang forward and snatched the cord. Alas, it was too long, and ere it had run six inches through his hands, Pompey had gathered it up and, setting his feet against one side and his back against the other, was pulling for very life. This pull baker pull devil business was not dignified; I dropped the rope and strode away.

I was busy getting some things out of my trunk, when Pompey reappeared with dinner. I paused and listened for the expected formula, and after a slight delay it came, as usual, with Massa Hale's compliments. I made no reply, and Pompey went away. When he came, an hour or two later, to remove the basket, I was awaiting him at the foot of the entrance.

"Look here, Pompey," I said, in my most persuasive tones, "how long is this thing going to last? A joke is a joke, but it is possible to go too far, you know. When will it end?"

"When, sah? Massa Hale ain't said a word 'bout it ending."

"But he can't keep me here for ever."

"No, sah; you die in time, sah."

"Yes, that is true, my friend, but I have a good constitution, and dying would be a long and tedious operation."

"Time'll do it, sah."

"Thank you, Pompey; you give me comfort. Say, Pompey, what made you tell your master where I was?"

"I didn't, sah. He knowed without me speaking a word."

"He knew? How the dickens do you make that out?"

"Well, sah, you see, sah, he told me to put you in here, sah," explained Pompey slowly, scratching his woolly pate.

"But he didn't know I was coming; he thought I had gone, you scamp."

Pompey grinned and looked diabolically silly.

"Come now, tell the truth," I said, severely.

The old man stood for some time buried in thought. Then with imperturbable gravity, he said: "Please, Massa Stanley, Pompey sends his com'liments and wants to know if you will give him your word of honour never to tell Massa Hale what he tells you, for Miss Beate's sake."

It was very comical, but the old man was in dead earnest, so I stifled my inclination to laugh, and replied: "I give you my word, Pompey."

"Thank you, sah. Massa Hale did know you was coming, sah. He spied you through de long glass, sah, and then run down alongside you in de boat, sah, and jist made sure, sah. Says he, 'Pompey, he's after Miss Beate; get him into the cave when you see me returning.'"

"And like a fool I let you slip the noose over my neck. Why did you lock the gate, may I ask?"

"Massa Hale did it, sah. Says he, 'Pompey, if he comes here for de reason I think, he will climb de gate. Otherwise, he will ring, or go back again. If he climbs de gate, put him in de cave.' Now, Massa Stanley, you did climb de gate, sah."

"Does Miss Hale know I am here?"

"No, sah; Pompey wivocated, sah, and said you had gone, sah," exclaimed Pompey, with an air of triumph at his power of equivocation.

"Indeed. Well, all I have to say, Pompey, is that you are a dangerous fool, and if you don't take care some day you will 'wivocate' yourself into a jail!"

"Miss Beate wouldn't say dat of de old man, sah," murmured Pompey, with an air of aggrieved innocence.

"She would if she knew you as I know you. Do you think you are serving her interests in what you are doing?"

"Yes, sah; if you will take Pompey's advice, sah," he answered with energy.

"And pray what is that?"

"That you hold out, sah; hold out to the end, sah. Good-night, sah!" And the negro beat a quick retreat.

I spent the evening thinking of what Pompey had told me. It certainly had shed a new light on the subject, but it was a bewildering light. It gave me less clue than ever to the motive of Hale's conduct.

Again I was awakened, next morning, with the sound of Pompey's voice, rolling off the inevitable formula which he had learnt by heart.

"Tell him," I shouted, "that if I stay here for ever I won't promise!"

"Yes, sah; thank you, sah," answered Pompey, cheerily.

I began to wonder if it was not possible to "sah" a man to death.

I got through the day as well as I could, but when Pompey came

with dinner, I was beginning to feel very depressed. The formula came, properly, when the basket was being removed, that is to say, after dinner. But to-day Pompey called out:

"Massa Stanley!"

"Well," I answered, testily.

"Please, sah, Massa Hale sends his com'liments and wants to know if you will give him your word of honour that you will marry Miss Beate right away, sah?"

"Eh? What's that?" I demanded in amazement.

Pompey repeated the message.

"Does Miss Hale know of this?"

Pompey hesitated some time before he answered.

"Pompey does not know, sah, but he guesses Miss Beate is all right, sah!"

"Well, I don't know about that; I must think it over till morning."

"Massa Stanley, think of Miss Beate, sah, nobody else. Miss Beate is a real angel, sah. Pompey loves the ground she walks on, sah!"

I did not go to bed all night, but walked about, and lay on the couch, smoking and thinking. The old adage concerning a pig in a poke, forced itself upon me relentlessly. I conjured up a score of good solid common-sense reasons why I should not marry Miranda on the terms offered. But for every reason I found a counter-reason. My mind was marvellously fertile in tender and chivalrous arguments. Of one thing I was certain; the destiny hour of my life had come.

It seemed a short night, and I was quite surprised when Pompey came, a little earlier than usual, with breakfast. Immediately that he had lowered the basket and the water-jar he began:

"Please, sah, Massa Hale sends his com'liments and wants to know if you will give him your word of honour that you will marry Miss Beate right away, sah?"

A thrill went through me, I cleared my throat and said: "Present my compliments to Mr. Hale, and tell him I am ready to marry his daughter when and where he sees fit."

"Glory, glory, glory," burst out Pompey, the tears rolling down the innumerable channels in his queer, honest old face.

In a few moments it was all over, and Pompey was himself again.

"Please, sah, Massa Hale says the marriage will be at twelve o'clock to-day, round here."

"Very good. I see he means to lose no time. No doubt he has already secured a parson, and has got the certificate in his pocket. Tell him I shall be ready."

"Yes, sah, God bless you, sah."

Well, I put on my dress suit, lit all my tapers, and waited. First came the parson, much bewildered; then came Pompey, followed by Hale and Miranda. Ah me! she took my breath away almost, so lovely, so ethereal, so gracious and majestic did she seem. Then our eyes met, and I knew, with tingling blood, that all was well.

HOLIDAY REST.

By a London Physician.

LIFE has been described as a condition of incessant change, due to the two opposite processes of destruction and repair. Our bodies are being constantly destroyed or burnt up by work, worry, and exercise, and at the same time are being repaired in two distinct ways.

The substances by which this is effected are three: solid, liquid, and gaseous. All three enter our body through the mouth. The solid and liquid, however, pass down into the stomach, while the gaseous food, the air we breathe, enters our lungs. What is of interest about all this is that we are always breathing or repairing part of the waste by the fresh air, whereas we only repair the remainder by eating and drinking at certain, or uncertain, intervals.

If, with these facts before us, we just change the two words Destruction and Repair into the shorter words Work and Rest, we at once reach our subject from an interesting point of view. Leaving the Work as beside the scope of the present article, we find that Rest, like the repair of the body, is conducted in two ways. It is carried on incessantly, or at any rate at short intervals all the year round, by sleep and leisure; and also periodically, in a larger way, by holidays.

If we repair our body by breathing fresh air seventeen times every minute, we likewise refresh it by sleeping seven times every week. And if, in addition, we further repair it by three meals a day, we likewise refresh it by three holidays a year: breakfast being at Christmas, lunch at Easter, and dinner at Midsummer.

At present, however, we will only touch on one of the three: for although Christmas and Easter may be kept as holidays they can hardly be described as seasons of rest. At Christmas, especially, the painful combination of a house full of children home for the holidays, a drawer full of bills awaiting payment, and an internal organ full of most indigestible food, is not soothing by any means to a worried brain and tired body.

Easter is not much better. If fortunately not a Volunteer, you may escape being seriously laid up from the severe fatigue generally undergone by such beings at this period. But in any case the time is too short for rest; while the unhappy and incongruous combination of the solemnity of a Good Friday and a Sunday with the undisguised cheerfulness of an Easter Monday spoil what few days can be snatched from business at this period.

No; the only time in the year which is analogous to the great repairing time of dinner in the way of a fair dose of rest, is the summer

holiday: an ever spreading and beneficent institution of these days of high pressure and hard pressure.

We do not write for the pampered few, all whose days are holidays and whose hardest occupations are the recreations of other men: but for the toiling many, whose keen zest for a holiday arises from eleven months of hard work. It is indeed wisely ordered that the full delights of rest and leisure can only be enjoyed by those who have earned and need them.

The present plan, where everyone takes his holiday at or about the same time, has both its "pros" and "cons." It certainly gives all a chance of fine weather and long days, when the open air has more attractions than the fireside. It also gives friends the opportunity of ruralising together. But, on the other hand, the very rush raises all prices to famine pitch, crowds to excess every decent watering place or holiday resort, and goes far to prevent the very rest one has waited so long to obtain.

Feeble efforts have indeed been made by individuals at uncertain times to alter this, but with doubtful success.

In the first place there is a distinct feeling of doing a sneaky and dubious sort of thing in running away when everyone else is hard at work: a feeling which is by no means lessened by the grudging way in which the leave is granted; there is the general surprise manifested by your fellow toilers, when your plan, long kept secret, of running away for a fortnight in March or May instead of September, is mooted. You feel conscious that you are going against public opinion before you start, and still more so after you have started, when with difficulty and various changes you reach your destination.

You walk down the well-remembered road from the station, generally so crowded, positively alone, carrying your own bag, and reach your lodging. Here you feel constantly in the way and miss with wonder the countless conveniences found later on.

One thing, however, you do undoubtedly get by holiday-making at this untimely season, and that is *rest*. The long parade is all your own; not a bath chair contests it with you. You may have all the bathing machines at once if you can pull them to the water yourself, for there is no one to move them; and you may walk on the pier as your private property, save for the trifling toll which is still levied at the entrance. The sea murmurs hoarsely on the pebbly beach unaccompanied by the sweet tones of any German band or Christy's Minstrels, and a strange sense of desolation is ever present with you.

No; sad holidays, like stolen goods, seldom bring peace of mind.

A large number of our social bees, however, have no choice in the matter. Their time is fixed; and if not fixed, is a matter of drawing lots for priority of choice. I think on the whole I should always choose my holiday rather late in the season, on several grounds.

First the pleasures of hope, often greater than the realisation, are thereby considerably prolonged. Then you are spared the

wretched feeling of having had your outing just when so many are starting off for theirs. As long as yours is to come you do not mind how many start before you. Moreover, later in the season prices are lower and everybody is more reasonable. Besides, the weather is cooler, and you can enjoy the seaside or country much more.

There is, I know, a delusion abroad that the country or seaside is cooler than town in summer, which is carefully fostered by thermometers and other fallacious fabricators of facts. They will tell you that in summer it is 62° in the shade in London, 61° in Torquay or Tunbridge Wells, and 60° in Penzance or Penmænmaur. But they do not tell you that in these latter places the shade is formed by a bathing machine or a brick wall, and in proportion to the sunshine is as 1 in 1,000, whereas in London it is as 1 to 2 : every street having its shady side, even in neighbourhoods not otherwise shady; while the luxuries of large rooms, sunblinds, ice, and hansom cabs keep the bodily temperature down in a way unattainable in the country.

On the whole, therefore, an autumn holiday is more enjoyable than one earlier in the summer. You are conscious of having "held on" to the very last, of honestly having worked till you can work no longer. You have become short in temper; your "angry passions" rise at very slight provocation in a way plainly condemned by Dr. Watts; you are getting sleepless at nights; you pick and peck at dinner instead of eating like a man; your wife and friends say plainly you are "not yourself" though unable to state who you are; you feel shaky and seedy, and begin to make mistakes in your work, which seems strangely burdensome. In short you require, and must have, total rest and change.

So far good. But now—How to get it. One thing is certain; for everyone who takes too long a holiday, nine hundred and ninety-nine take too short a one. Holidays increase in their power for good far faster than in number of days. If a week does you good, a fortnight will do you three times as much, and a month ten times as much, and so on.

We are getting on, you observe, by degrees. We have decided that you want a holiday, and have answered the "when" by saying the end of the summer. Now for the "how" and the "where." How shall we rest? You observe it is *rest* we seek. Shall we rest by a walking tour, by a bicycle tour, by a coaching tour, a railway tour, a steamboat or yachting tour, a nondescript or mixed tour, or by no tour at all?

The answer entirely depends on the nature of rest we require and on our age and condition.

Are we schoolboys? Then walking, or boating, or bicycling, or tricycling through new and varied scenery rests and repairs the surely taxed "Public School" brain. Are we just ordinary people who, not having toiled unduly, require change rather than rest? Then an active combination of steamboat and train and coach will rattle us about to our heart's content. Have we been closely confined and subjected

to steady brain labour? A quieter tour, without hurry of this mixed description, will be best. Are we melancholy and despondent? Distraction, which often brings true rest to these feelings, will be found in bright and bustling watering places. If past middle life and not very energetic, after hard brain work, a quiet watering place and no tour at all might give most rest. Are we rushing about all the year in our business, from place to place, using body as well as mind? Then in our holiday we must wisely and firmly rest both, by lying on our back in the sun or shade in a solitary place.

I am persuaded that a doctor's fee could not be better bestowed than by taking medical advice as to the character of holidays that would give us most rest.

All the body rarely wants to be rested in a holiday at the same time. We rest one part by working another. It is most important that that which we undertake should be proportionate to our age and health. It is ridiculous and dangerous for steady men of business to become amateur athletes for a fortnight in the year, or for pallid governesses to emulate the Alpine Club. Nothing is more foolish for most people than to try and distinguish themselves by some arduous feat during the solitary month or fortnight in the year they are supposed to rest.

So much for the "how." Now for the "where."

Complete contrast affords the greatest rest to body and mind. Those whose ordinary landscape is the first floor front over the way, and whose sun rises and sets over the chimney pots, do best by the sea, by moor, by lake or mountain. Dwellers in the country, on the other hand, enjoy a holiday in town immensely. The mountaineer loves the plain, the inland worker seeks the sea, the seaside resident flies to the country.

Without giving "recipes" for holidays like a professed Cook, we may indicate a few of our most accessible beauty spots.

For bracing by the sea in the summer there is nothing like the East Coast of England and Scotland. For a purely marine air, whatever that may be, we get the Isle of Man, Heligoland, and, milder, the Channel Islands. Less bracing but still fresh and invigorating is North Wales and Aberystwith; while milder, though not even in summer oppressively hot, is South Wales, the Cornish and Devonshire coasts.

Mild and cool in the very height of summer are the lovely coasts of Kerry, Clare, Mayo, and Donegal in the West of Ireland, presenting unexplored beauties and a repose and quiet unknown in England, though greatly deficient in every sort of tourist accommodation; while the Eastern and Northern coasts of Ireland teem also with lovely watering places, all more or less invigorating. Touring grounds are fewer. The grandest and most varied by far are the Islands and Highlands of Western Scotland. Next, the Snowdon district, then the Lake country, then the north and west and south of Ireland, and finally Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. Short tours can of course be made

anywhere, and may be full of interest. One tour round a garden has formed the subject of a large book.

More complete change in every way is to be obtained by crossing the English Channel. The food, the people, the language, the scenery are all so novel that it is most beneficial to brains engaged in monotonous brain work, such as teaching. A short tour on the Continent works miracles with these. If quiet and artistic, go to Holland; if you have a family and are frivolous go to the coast of Belgium, France and Normandy ; if a sportsman, and with one male friend, go to Norway ; if a good sailor, go to Iceland, taking the Shetlands en route. If time is no object, visit the capitals of Europe ; if you want to see the most beauty in the shortest space of time, go to Switzerland, that playground of all the civilised world ; if romantic and fond of heat, go to Spain.

But it is time we were off. The last day has arrived. At half past five we are quietly posting the ledger in the exact place we have sat in for the last eleven months, calm externally but an exulting spirit within. In our office drawer are countless plans of towns and a time-table. At a quarter to six we close the book quietly ; we don't slam it ; we put on our hat, pocket the paper ; and only one solitary "Good-bye, Jones : hope you'll enjoy yourself," from a fellow-clerk betrays the fact that at nine to-morrow morning we shall not be there.

Where *shall* we be ? Ah, where ! Already our holiday has begun. We go home with a sense of keen enjoyment. We regard with a pitying air the toiling crowds on the pavement who are staying in town. We are Sauls, head and shoulders taller than all the cockney world. In our purse are the golden sovereigns. Once at home the calm is thrown to the winds. The portmanteau is strapped down. Dinner despatched. A servant sent flying for a hansom, and at 7.30 we are off for King's Cross.

We are better already. Our brain is clearer. If we could keep starting off like this for a week we should be well without going anywhere. At the station we recklessly overpay the cabby and tip the porter, and find we are half an hour before time. A glorious half-hour. Our old friend Tom, who is to share our holiday, joins us, and we pace up and down the spacious platform waiting for the train to be drawn up. At 8.15, it is backed into the station. Oh, what bliss ! We see the carriages labelled with Greenock, Oban, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Perth, Inverness, and all sorts of enchanting words. We have at last reached that very moment when the long deferred pleasures of hope, the dreams and plans of the last three months are to be realised.

Proudly purchasing a ticket from a dyspeptic clerk whom we profoundly pity, we invest in a paper and select a couple of corner seats. We are in the highest possible spirits, and as the train moves off and increases her pace northward, we get fairly delirious.

Next morning at seven we are rattling through the lovely Vale of

Perth to its fair city, where we stop and get out for breakfast. What a change in one night! We are free. We are 500 miles from last night's ledger. Instead of the little parlour, the grey table-cloth, the flabby toast, the weak coffee and stale eggs of our London repast, we sit down like peers in the Queen's refreshment rooms to piles of scones and fish, and eggs and bacon, and coffee and cream.

One or two hints.

Your object is *rest*. You don't come to explore or even to sightsee. Your first object is *rest of brain*, and *not too much fatigue of body*. If not very limited to time, take the first few days quietly; get a little used to the new, strange freedom. You are like a prisoner at liberty after being chained for years. Use your freedom quietly.

Many people spoil their whole holiday by great excess in railway travelling at the outset and close of their trip. Others do worse and fly from place to place as if going round the world in ninety days. And not a few, therefore, regularly return more jaded and worn than when they started. This is foolish; it is worse: it is not right. I need say no more.

Beware of being harassed by money matters. Ten to one you have enough of this at home. Possibly your holiday is mainly needed for this cause. Hence select such a tour as shall be easily within your means, and having set aside a certain sum, spend it freely.

Beware of letters. Carefully leave the address of your first stopping place, and then keep moving, so that your letters shall follow you round and only reach you when your tour is done and half of them have answered themselves.

Take your enjoyment temperately but thoroughly, and *on no account* do any work remotely resembling that you have left. You may row, or ride, or fish, or shoot, or walk to your heart's content, but not write, or even read much. Do not neglect your meals or be too irregular. If one brain restorative is rest, the other is good red blood.

Finally, if humble-minded, take advice as to where to go. If wise in your own conceits, take that form of holiday that you feel you would enjoy best; and, even if not theoretically right, the holiday, being well earned, is sure to do you good.

THE SIREN.

AN EPISODE OF COWES REGATTA.

By Lady Virginia Sandars.

IT was a lovely evening during the height of the Regatta week at Cowes. A brilliant knot of the crême de la crême of society, gathered together in the club gardens, giving but slender attention to the racing yachts sleepily returning from an unexciting race, were suddenly roused to greater interest by sight of a splendid three masted yacht slowly rounding Osborne point.

So still was the air that the rattling of her chain as she dropped anchor could distinctly be heard on shore.

Glasses were raised, gossip and flirtation arrested, as all eagerly wondered to whom this splendid yacht could possibly belong.

"Pray, Lord Felix, find out all about her at once," said the Duchess of Denbishire, the centre of attraction in that gay little group.

Lord Felix, whose sole occupation in life was to fulfil the Duchess's mandates, rose from the grass where he was lying at her feet, and entered the club, returning with the reply that though all were equally curious none could throw any light on the mysterious stranger.

"How very provoking," exclaimed the Duchess. "Pray make a further exertion and enquire at the signalman's lodge."

"Life is full of disappointments, Duchess. Add this to your number, and don't submit your humble slave to a sunstroke by further exposure to its fierce rays."

The Duchess laughed as the young man threw himself again at her feet.

"And look," he continued, "here comes Mrs. Beverley, who knows everything—at least, so she says. Perhaps she can enlighten us."

"I almost prefer remaining in ignorance to being indebted to such an oracle. She is the greatest bore in Christendom, and if it were not for that lovely step-daughter would be ostracised by society."

As the Duchess spoke, an elderly lady, with a peevish-inquisitive face, was entering the gardens, followed by a girl of extreme loveliness, the beauty of the season—amiable and unspoilt, though enjoying to the full all the popularity beauty carries in its train.

"How do you do, Mrs. Beverley?" said the Duchess, without lowering the glasses through which she was intently gazing.

"I am sorry Zoe will have to procure herself another chaperon for your dance to-morrow, Duchess," said Mrs. Beverley, in a dreary voice of importance. Receiving no answer, she continued with sepulchral satisfaction at having such an announcement to impart: "Have you heard that my cousin, Lady Lodore, is dead?"

"Is she? poor thing! Well we must all die some day," carelessly responded the Duchess; continuing immediately in a tone of despair: "Will *no* one discover to whom that lovely yacht belongs?"

"Perhaps I may be able to satisfy your curiosity," said Miss Beverley, coming forward.

"You, my pretty Zoe?"

"I did not say I was sure," said Zoe, with pretty shyness, feeling everyone's attention fixed upon her as she raised the Duchess's glasses to her lovely blue eyes. In a few moments she exclaimed gleefully:

"Yes, I am right. It is the dear *Siren*."

"But the owner, the owner?" cried all in chorus.

"The dearest, most delightful woman that ever lived. Mrs. Granby Vandeleur, with whom I spent last winter in the Mediterranean."

"What, old Vandeleur's widow? to whom he left his enormous wealth?"

"Precisely, Lord Felix. What will you give for an introduction? She is my kindest and best friend. And I must be off at once to greet her—that is if I am allowed to do so." She glanced comically at her step-mother.

"But stay, Zoe," said the Duchess. "Is there not something romantic about her history?"

"Nothing superlatively romantic in a woman marrying a man old enough to be her grandfather for money," observed Lord Felix. "But you must have seen her, Duchess. About eight years ago old Van took her everywhere. He was proud of his young wife; hung her with chains of diamonds and ropes of pearls. And what with her white face and large sad eyes she always gave me the idea of a victim decked out for sacrifice."

"She was a victim—and was sacrificed," said Zoe, in a low voice.

"Love sacrificed to Mammon—not an unusual occurrence," observed the Duchess, drily.

"I only know a little of her past. But of this I am sure, no base motive could ever have actuated any action of Edna Vandeleur's life," replied Zoe, warmly.

"You stand bravely by your friends, Miss Beverley," said a gentleman, who, unobserved, had joined the group, and was intently listening to the foregoing conversation. Lately returned from the Indian mutiny, where he had lost an arm but gained the Victoria Cross and a C. B., he was the hero of the hour. A tall, striking-looking man, whose empty coat sleeve enhanced the interest with which he inspired all woman-kind.

Zoe gave a little start, saying with a heightened colour as she held out her hand:

"Am I not right to stand up for my friends, Colonel Trevelyan?"

"Most certainly; and happy those who number one so loyal as Miss

Beverley among theirs," he replied, drawing a chair close to hers with the evident design of devoting himself to Zoe, and to her only. But the Duchess, who had no scruple in interrupting any conversation in which she was not included, however interesting to those engaged, here broke in, saying :

"Have you observed that lovely yacht just anchored, Colonel Trevelyan? Miss Beverley is giving us most romantic details of its owner. Pray go on, Zoe; Colonel Trevelyan cannot fail to be interested in a widow, young, rich, and of course pretty."

"Oh! much more than pretty—interesting-looking to the last degree," said Zoe, enthusiastically. "For five years she nursed her husband, who was paralysed, and part of the time out of his mind, and they say no one ever heard a murmur pass her lips, though his temper was awful."

"Poor creature! what a relief it must have been when he died," said the Duchess.

"She never said so," replied Zoe, gravely. "On the contrary, she told me that being so alone in the world, when her long nursing was ended she felt a blank in existence and was inclined to become a sister of charity."

"Mrs. Vandeleur is evidently a paragon, but I have no doubt the blank in her existence is capable of being filled in. I shall do my best to help in this good work by sending her an invitation to my dance through you, Zoe. Then, gentlemen, you shall all have the privilege of being introduced to this interesting widow. Do you enter your name for the Consolation stakes, Colonel Trevelyan?" said the Duchess, casting a slightly malicious glance towards Zoe.

"Already knowing Mrs. Vandeleur, I require no introduction," replied Colonel Trevelyan, with a curious inflection of voice, while a slight colour mounted into his bronzed face.

"You know her?" repeated Zoe, in low tones of surprise.

"I should rather say I knew Mrs. Vandeleur, for it is years since we met. She may have forgotten me. Possibly I might not recognise her."

In the little flutter of commotion caused at this moment by Royalty entering the gardens, Miss Beverley, having received her step-mother's permission, slipped away, as she thought unperceived, towards the boats for hire, wondering why Edna Vandeleur had never told her she knew Colonel Trevelyan.

"May I call you a boat?" said a voice close at her shoulder: a voice causing her heart to beat, though she answered primly :

"You take a pleasure in startling me, I think, Colonel Trevelyan. Yes, please get me a boat. I am going to see your friend and mine, Mrs. Vandeleur. Shall I take any message for you?"

"Thank you, none. We shall, I suppose, meet to-morrow night," he answered a little gravely. Then with a smile: "Will you give me the first valse?"

Zoe nodded her head prettily. How pleased she was! Willingly would she have accorded him every dance of the evening.

After watching the receding boat for a few moments, Colonel Trevelyan moved slowly away, thinking its occupant the fairest woman he had ever met—good and true as she was lovable.

"Oh," he murmured, "*she* would never act as weakly as Edna did. Poor Edna. I can afford to forgive her now. Strange destiny, our paths crossing again just at this moment."

Colonel Trevelyan, like many others, found it easy to forgive a wound the pain of which had passed from memory, leaving no sear behind.

On the deck of that fair yacht she, who has already furnished a topic of conversation for all Cowes, paces up and down in a state of excitement wholly belying the Madonna outline of her gentle features, the patient, pathetic expression of her soft brown eyes.

Not beautiful, Edna Vandeleur is, as Miss Beverley asserted, essentially interesting. That hers has not been a happy life is shown in the weary lines about the sensitive mouth, the settled furrow between those dark brows. But this even adds pathos to the sad, sweet face.

That some long-brewing storm, hitherto controlled, has burst its bonds and is now moving to its very depths this usually self-contained nature, is evident by the way Edna's slender fingers are passionately entwined as she restlessly treads the deck of the *Siren*, occasionally stopping abruptly to take up the glasses lying at hand to gaze intently on the opposite shore.

"Shall I really see him again, hear his voice, feel the touch of that hand," she whispers, softly. "Ah, it almost makes me mad with joy. To think I can perhaps re-instate myself in his respect, if not in his affections; tell him it was no mercenary motive that induced me to cast aside his precious love. That I do not deserve those terrible accusations he heaped upon me, lying like lead on my poor weary heart ever since. Oh, my lost love! shall I find you again? or will all be forgotten—all changed?"

Suddenly Mrs. Vandeleur almost threw down the glasses, went swiftly into the deck cabin and, with true womanly instinct but no spark of vanity, scanned her face closely in the glass. Then turning away with a sigh, she almost unconsciously exclaimed aloud: "Changed! changed! Sorrow and disappointment have done their work. Ah! How I have suffered."

The splash of oars at the yacht's side and a sweet young voice calling out: "Is Mrs. Vandeleur on board?" restored Edna to self-possession. She came out of the cabin and answered for herself.

"On board certainly, my Zoe; and seeing I know no one on shore where else should I be?"

Another moment and Zoe had sprung swiftly up on deck and was embracing her friend, as she said merrily:

"And so here you are at last! How glad I am to see you."

"And now I am here what do you intend doing with me?"

"Introduce you to everybody worth knowing, and take you to the Duchess of Denbishire's dance to-morrow evening, where you are to chaperon the beauty of the season. Of course you are aware who she is," Zoe said demurely, making a little curtsey. "Everyone is on the tip-toe of excitement to see the owner of the *Siren*, and to be invited on board. We shall be the sensation of the evening. Steppikins will not be there, being in woe for a thirteenth cousin—and she likes airing her grand connections even when dead—so I can dance with whom I like, and ——"

"Dear child, are you and your step-mother no better friends?"

"Worse, Edna; worse, since I refused Lord Blackpool at the end of the season. My home is not a happy one, but not even to escape that would I marry a man I did not love. I really think I would rather die. There is something so false in such an act."

No sooner had these words escaped impulsive Zoe's mouth than observing a spasm of pain pass over her friend's face, she could have bitten off her tongue. Her colour rose to carmine as she silently and deprecatingly placed her arms round Mrs. Vandeleur.

"My dearest, do not be troubled. You have spoken truly. A woman had better die than wed one she does not love. Once I did not think so. Now I know that it is hardly possible to commit a greater wrong. A wrong which is sure to be followed by its bitter punishment, even though committed for the sake of others."

Mrs. Vandeleur spoke with deep and concentrated emotion, but quickly recovered, and continued calmly:

"As you really wish me to chaperon you to-morrow I cannot refuse. But I shall not know a soul at this dance."

"Yes, you will. Colonel Trevelyan will be there. Why did you not tell me you knew him, Edna? Besides being the bravest, he is the most charming man I ever met."

Zoe spoke with quick vivacity and assumed calmness, but had she been less occupied with concealing the deep interest with which Colonel Trevelyan had inspired her, she could not have failed to notice her friend's agitation at her words.

"I was unaware you were acquainted with Colonel Trevelyan, Zoe. We were friends once, but so long ago that we may not recognise each other when we meet again. Did he—send me any—message?"

The quiver in Mrs. Vandeleur's voice as she asked this question caused Zoe to look more intently at her. What did each read in the other's eyes that caused both to lower those traitor orbs? Edna's heart beat to suffocation as Zoe rather coldly replied:

"None. He hopes to see you to-morrow night."

"Dear Zoe," said Mrs. Vandeleur, "can you not procure yourself another chaperon for to-morrow? I really do not feel equal to facing the world after having so long given up its pleasures."

Now that the wish of her heart was about to be fulfilled Mrs. Vandeleur shrunk from meeting in public, and for the first time after their long parting, him she so longed to see.

"If you don't go to this dance you deprive me of this amusement also, for I will have no other chaperon," said Zoe, firmly. So give in with a good grace, dear Edna. And now I must fly. As it is, I realise that hot words though a cold dinner may be my portion to-night."

Lovingly the girl kissed her friend, ran quickly down the *Siren's* side and waved a second adieu to Edna from the boat.

Edna Vandeleur's whole existence had been sacrificed to others. Mr. Desmond, her father, a man of family, had been a bad husband and a selfish spendthrift. Her mother was an invalid for more years than Edna could recollect. In tender devotion to the latter, and in striving to carry out domestic economies necessitated by the egotistical extravagance of her father, Edna's young life was passed. Little reward did the girl receive in return for this complete abnegation of self, for Mrs. Desmond's affections were entirely wrapped up in her three handsome boys, Mr. Desmond's totally in himself.

But the day came when a glorious sunshine pierced through the clouds of Edna's joyless existence. She loved and was loved by Harold Trevelyan. But he was too poor to wed, and no engagement was allowed. And thus, as many have done before and since, they parted in a passionate embrace, vowing to remain true to each other until better times should come.

For Edna that time never arrived. Soon after Captain Trevelyan's departure abroad, Mrs. Desmond died, extracting from her daughter a solemn promise that she would be a protector to her younger brothers and make their lives her first consideration.

"Remember your father is worse than none," she added, impressively; and Edna pledged her word.

Two years more and Mr. Desmond informed his daughter they were utterly ruined. The boys must at once leave school and college unless she consented to marry his old friend Vandeleur, who was ready to do everything for her brothers if she consented.

"Our future is in your hands, Edna," said the elder brother, who, like his father, was pre-eminently selfish. "If you hold to your childish engagement with Harold Trevelyan my career is ended. Vandeleur is an excellent fellow; certainly a little old, but able to give you everything the heart of woman can desire."

Edna smiled bitterly; she had but one desire—to be true to him she loved. But in that case her brothers' careers would be ruined, and her promise to her mother broken. Fierce and long was the struggle in the poor girl's bosom, but so was the pressure put upon her. Finally she yielded, and, with a morbid recollection of her promise, fully believed she was doing her duty.

When she received her young lover's passionate and contemptuous condemnation of her conduct, she was married, unutterably miserable, and then knew she had committed an irretrievable error; an error which was not even compensated for by happy results, for ultimately, her elder brother followed in his father's footsteps, while the two younger died of an epidemic fever at school.

In loneliness and sorrow Edna nursed her husband, who recognising in the end her heavenly goodness, left her everything he possessed. Ten years had elapsed since Edna and Colonel Trevelyan had parted in that to her unforgotten embrace, for owing to no uncommon chain of circumstances they had never since met.

Happiness has a grand regenerating power, and as Mrs. Vandeleur wistfully watched in the glowing sunset Zoe's slowly receding boat, such a smile of hope rested on her gentle face as softened it into more youthful lines. "So the only two people I care for know each other," she thought. Suddenly blotting out that happy smile came another thought. "Ah, if he knows her, may he not also love her? But no," murmured the sanguine heart, "she spoke too calmly of him. Anyway, to-morrow will tell if the old love is quite dead."

"Pale evening and roseate dawn," whispered Lord Felix to his hostess, as Zoe, perfectly satisfied with the sensation they had created on entering the Duchess's drawing-room, presented Edna.

"How charming of you to have accepted my invitation without waiting for a formal introduction, Mrs. Vandeleur," said the Duchess, in her most engaging manner. And none could be more engaging when she chose. Edna bowed. She had no words at command. Outwardly calm, every nerve was thrilling with wildest emotion, for close to the Duchess stood the lover of Edna's youth.

Mistaking such silence for nervousness at finding herself once more in the gay world, the Duchess turned to Colonel Trevelyan.

"There at least is one old friend amongst those who, unfortunately for them, have become strangers to you, Mrs. Vandeleur," she said, kindly.

A hasty message announcing the arrival of the Royal party here caused the Duchess to hasten away. Up to this moment Colonel Trevelyan had stood transfixed, painfully asking himself, as he gazed at Edna, whether this pale, sad-looking woman could be indeed the bright love of his youth. Good heavens! What must her life have been to have left such an impress of suffering? In the profound pity inspired by such a thought, any lingering trace of bitterness was obliterated, and coming rapidly forward he said in friendly accents:

"You have forgotten me, I think, Mrs. Vandeleur! It is hardly to be wondered at, considering how long it is since we met."

As she heard once more that voice which had sounded to her ears like sweetest music, all her wrong to Colonel Trevelyan struck the unhappy Edna with redoubled force. For an instant she was seized

with the insane desire to fling herself at his feet, exclaiming, "Forgotten you! Never—never to my misery! Oh, Harold, my love, forgive me, forgive me!"

Thus Edna's heart spoke. But society, in its august presence, very properly expects us to control the more excitable promptings of this occasionally troublesome organ, and poor Edna had had a long apprenticeship in so doing. With a calmness which might have passed for want of feeling, she answered gently: "Oh, no, I never forget. I should have known you anywhere."

A gay valse striking up at this moment, Zoe, who had been intently observing the foregoing scene, was heard to say in clear, measured accents:

"Thank you, Lord Felix; I am engaged to Colonel Trevelyan for this valse; but I will introduce you to Mrs. Vandeleur."

"Did you think I had forgotten that this was our dance, Miss Beverley?" asked Colonel Trevelyan, placing his arm round Zoe's pretty waist.

"You seemed so interested in meeting an old friend, you might have been excused if you had," replied Zoe, demurely, sweeping up her blue eyes at him.

"I *was* deeply interested," he returned. "If you care to hear why, and later will venture with me into the garden, I will tell you. Will you come now?"

"Won't you dance, Mrs. Vandeleur? No—quite right. It is far too hot to spin round this small room. We will talk instead," said Lord Felix, throwing himself languidly on the sofa where Edna was sitting. She was unaware she had made any response. But she had no wish to dance, nor had she the slightest inclination to talk. Edna simply wished to think; she was in a state of ecstasy. She had seen Harold. He had spoken so softly that she felt herself forgiven. Her whole being pulsated with wildest joy.

Undeterred by her silence, Lord Felix carried on the ball of conversation.

"I hear you have the most lovely yacht in the world, Mrs. Vandeleur. I hope you will invite me on board."

"With pleasure," replied Edna, who of all her great possessions cared only for the *Siren*. Then feeling something more in the way of conversation was required on her part, she added: "Will you tell me something about all these gay people amongst whom, owing to Miss Beverley, I rather unexpectedly find myself."

"Delighted," replied Lord Felix. "With our beauty and our hero you are already acquainted. Both celebrated. She for having refused that conceited ass Blackpool, who now swears he never proposed—only nobody believes him. He for having lost an arm—how well he valses without it—while saving a comrade's life."

Here Lord Felix stopped talking to notice how the flush in Mrs.

Vandeleur's cheek improved her, as she said with gentle eagerness :

"Pray continue. I am interested."

Enchanted with his success, the young man went on glibly. "They will make a handsome couple. Everyone expects it will be decided to-night. Step-mothers are awful women—will make a row. But our Beauty has a soul above step-mothers.—Hullo, Mrs. Vandeleur, you are not well, I fear. Let me fetch you a glass of water."

"No, no," gasped Edna. "A little air is all I want. I am unaccustomed to hot rooms."

The valse was ending as Lord Felix pioneered his companion to the verandah. Willingly would he have remained by her side. Silent and pale as she was, Mrs. Vandeleur had raised his curiosity. But an imperative message from the Duchess recalled him to neglected duties. She allowed no philandering. "What can you find in that tall, silent ghost to amuse you?" she crossly asked.

"I find her a most interesting psychological study," he replied, drily.

For some minutes after Lord Felix's departure Edna remained transfixed as a woman turned to stone. It was only within the last few months that the hope of reinstating herself in her former lover's good opinion had arisen. And now she realised with anguish that, if Lord Felix's words were true, Colonel Trevelyan would care nothing to revert to that past upon which she so fondly dwelt.

After a few moments, fearful of Lord Felix's return, she rose and glided slowly into the darkness, her black dress mingling with the night shadows causing her to be almost invisible.

How long she wandered about in silent misery she was hardly conscious, but all at once it occurred to Edna that Zoe would miss her, and she retraced her steps. Suddenly she stopped, clasping her hands to her bosom as though she had received a blow. Ah! what did those soft, brown eyes behold that made them dilate so piteously?

Seated on a bench, his brave arm encircling her, her head reclining on his shoulder, were Colonel Trevelyan and Zoe. He was speaking, and these were the words, which falling on Edna's ears, pierced her heart more cruelly than a knife :

"Zoe, I will not deceive you. Years ago I did love Mrs. Vandeleur, and was deeply moved to-night at seeing her so changed. But from the moment she gave herself to another, whom I well knew she could not love, my love was extinguished for ever."

"Poor Edna!" murmured Zoe.

"Yes. She is indeed to be pitied. Later I learned the whole story, and knew how far she had been sacrificed. But it was too late, my love was dead; and my heart found it very difficult to make excuse for a woman who had perjured her honour and truth—even for the sake of others. And now, Zoe, believe me when I say I love you, you only, with the whole depth and strength of my soul."

He stooped, and the girl looking up, their lips met.

"What was that?" cried Zoe, springing blushingly back. "It sounded like a moan."

"No, my darling. Only the sough of the wind through the trees. The wind is rising."

A few minutes later, Lord Felix, anxious to resume his psychological studies, hurried up to Mrs. Vandeleur, saying eagerly:

"I have been hunting everywhere for you, Mrs. Vandeleur. But Heavens! you are paler than ever, and look as though I had roused you from a mesmeric trance."

"I think I have been dreaming, Lord Felix. But I am awake now"—she gave a sad little smile—"and quite recovered. Will you take me back to the ball-room. I forgot I am a chaperon."

Mrs. Vandeleur spoke with perfect calmness. The hand she placed on Lord Felix's arm was cold as ice.

When Zoe awoke next morning, with the consciousness that some great event had taken place in her life, she had a mingled sensation of intense happiness for herself and fear of what she had to reveal to Edna. As she prepared to rise, a note was placed in her hands containing these words:

"ZOE.—When you receive this I shall be en route for Norway. I have lived too long in retirement not to feel quite out of my element in the gay world of Cowes. I shall not be alone, as I pick up my old governess and companion at Dartmouth. Little traitress! Why not tell me what all the world knew, and I discovered for myself last night? I have only time to say, God bless you, my Zoe. That you and Colonel Trevelyan may ever be happy in each other's love is the fervent prayer of your friend,

"EDNA."

With one bound Zoe sprang from her bed, flying with unslippered feet to the window. She saw it all now. Edna had been in the garden the previous night—had heard everything.

"Poor, poor Edna!" sobbed Zoe, as she sank on her knees, covering her face with her hands, through which the tears flowed fast; for she realised, too truly, that her happiness was built on the ruins of Edna's hopes.

Crash, crash, went the signal guns. The racing yachts were starting. A brisk breeze was blowing. But far in advance of the racers could be seen the tall masts of the graceful *Siren*, who, with all her canvas spread, scudded swiftly before the wind.

How nobly she breasted the waves! How lightly and joyously she danced along! And yet she was heavily freighted—for she carried a woman's broken heart.

THE TURRET DOOR.

IT was a beautiful and still evening towards the end of summer, when in the course of my wanderings about the ancient city I entered the quiet and solitary close of the grey cathedral. The rooks were gathering in the old elms which stood around. A ruddy light wrapped the great grey towers which rose far up into the evening air. The sounds of the city from without came faintly and at intervals to the ear as I walked slowly across the close towards the low wide steps which ascended and were lost in the shadow of the noble porch.

On reaching the great door of the cathedral I found it closed. But in the centre of this there was another smaller door which still stood open—and here a party of visitors, to whom I was a stranger, were endeavouring to persuade the ancient verger that the hour was not yet too late to permit them to inspect the interior. It so happened that just as I came up they had succeeded in overcoming his hesitation, and he turned to lead the way into the building.

The party followed him, and I among them.

Inside, the stillness was profound; the lightest footfall awoke echoes. The evening light fell, laden with the rich and coloured gloom of painted windows, on the dark carving of the stalls, on the great tubes of the silent organ, on the scrolls of the epitaphs, on the marble images of warriors, priests and kings. The silence of the antique nave, the coloured gloom of the painted panes, the sense of antiquity in all the air impressed their influence upon the mind with even more than customary power. I had had no other motive in entering the cathedral than to indulge the ordinary curiosity of a stranger—very certainly I anticipated no more than the ordinary incidents of such a visit. No mortal *could* have been less prepared for an adventure. How could I dream that a strange, a wildly strange experience, was to befall me before I should stand again without those grey and ancient walls?

And yet, so it was.

The truth of this extraordinary story is known to many persons, and my veracity may be easily verified. The facts of the case are these.

The party of visitors to which I had joined myself had completed, under the guidance of the verger, the customary tour of inspection round the ancient fabric, and were now preparing to leave the building. I had fallen for a moment behind the rest, in order to examine a fine and deeply interesting specimen of antique carving which covered the whole of the wall near which I stood. The great door of the cathedral, where the rest of the party were now standing, was not visible from this spot; but I could hear their voices plainly, round the angle of the wall. Aware that I had not much time to linger unless I wished to be locked up all night, I cast a last glance at the rich tracery of the woodwork and prepared reluctantly to turn away.

Suddenly my eye was caught by a portion of the carving which seemed to stand out slightly from the rest. I put my hand upon the carved head of the apostle Peter and pulled it outwards. To my amazement a door opened in the carving, showing beyond it a dark passage. I stooped forward and looked in. As I did so the door, which was thick and massive, and which was hung slantingly upon its hinges in such a manner as to close with its own weight, swung heavily back from the position into which I had pushed it, and coming unexpectedly upon me as I stooped forward, projected me into the opening and shut behind me.

The suddenness of the incident and the total darkness in which I found myself entombed startled and confused me. But at first I felt no positive alarm. I attempted at once to push open the door, but to my surprise it did not yield I pushed harder—harder yet—I exerted all my strength, but the door remained immovable.

At last, finding all my efforts useless, I endeavoured to attract the attention of those outside. I raised my voice and called loudly for assistance, at the same time beating a vigorous tattoo with my stick against the door. I then paused and listened, in the expectation of being speedily released. But to my surprise and alarm the minutes passed and there was no response.

With a vague terror at heart I renewed my endeavours. I raised a clamour that awoke the echoes of the building. But still no voice replied from outside my prison, no hand released the fastening of the door. Gradually the conviction forced itself upon my mind that I had delayed too long. While I had been trying to force open the door by my own efforts, the party of visitors had left the cathedral, either without observing my absence, or perhaps supposing that I had left before them. The verger had locked up the building and departed. There was no one within hearing to assist me.

My consternation at this discovery may be conceived. The idea that I was fated to pass the night in this dark and narrow prison was one which I refused to entertain. Again, again, and yet again I hurled myself against the wooden barrier, with rage, with fury, with despair. Not until I had exhausted every effort in my power, not

until every gleam of hope had vanished from my mind, did I give up the attempt to force the door as hopeless, and turned away from it to examine more narrowly the place of my imprisonment. Nothing now seemed left to me but to ascertain how I might pass the hours with least discomfort, until I might expect assistance from without.

In my assaults upon the door I had already discovered that the place in which I was enclosed was of very small dimensions. It was, in fact, little more than a recess or deep niche in the masonry, not exceeding three feet square, it would neither enable me to lie at full length, nor to obtain any other relief for my tired limbs than by the change of one cramped and uneasy posture for another. The floor was of solid pavement. The roof, as I stood erect, just touched my head. The walls, like the floor, were of massive stone. Standing close to one of these, and casting my eyes upwards, I made a discovery which filled me at first with surprise, and afterwards with extreme perplexity.

Between the roof and the wall there was a space of at least four inches. Through this space I became aware of a faint gleam of light very far above my head. With the object of ascertaining the length of this aperture I moved along the wall, keeping my eye upon the crevice. The light did not vanish. I turned the angle of the wall and still the light remained visible. I traversed in succession the four walls of the cell; no obstacle obscured the feeble gleam. The roof did not touch the walls at a single point of the circuit.

At this unaccountable discovery I was so astounded that for some time I refused to credit the evidence of my own senses. The roof was, to all appearance, like Mahomet's coffin, suspended in mid air. I struck it with my stick; it sounded heavy, massive, substantial as the walls themselves. But yet neither to the touch, nor by the peculiar ringing sound which it emitted when struck did it seem to be of stone. It gave rather the impression of a block of solid iron. But how could this be?

Totally unable to account for this discovery, I now placed myself on the floor of the cell, my back supported against one of the walls, and my feet against the opposite, and was relieved to find that the posture was more tolerable than I expected. I began to be not without hope that I might in time be able to fall asleep, and so pass a portion of the weary hours before me in unconsciousness. Little did I know what was to rouse me. Sleep! It was not sleep that was in store for me.

Presently a loud and startling sound, seeming to issue from the roof above my head, burst suddenly upon the silence. It was the great clock of the cathedral striking the hour. The notes fell slowly from a deep, solemn and sonorous bell. But instead of reaching my prison as might have been expected, in dull, far-off and muffled tones, they fell upon my ears with thrilling clearness and distinctness, as if they were close at hand. It was evident, in fact, that my cell must

be situated directly under the clock tower. This conclusion, however, led me no further at the moment.

I sat for a long time in reflection upon the number of hours which must elapse before I could expect to be set free. The bell had struck the hour of six. The cathedral would probably not be open in the morning before nine or ten. I had therefore some fifteen hours at least before me to get through as best I might.

How slowly the time waned! At seemingly long intervals the bells struck the quarters: one, two, three, four; and then in deeper tones the hour itself—seven. And now, when the ringing sound of the last note had died away, the bells of the carillon began to chime. The notes fell on my ears with the same singular and unaccountable distinctness which I had observed in the striking of the hour. They chimed the evening hymn.

Very suddenly a strange thought struck me, causing me to raise my eyes towards the ceiling of my cell. In my present position I could just perceive the faint gleam of light discernible far up through the interspace between the roof and the wall; but the roof itself was buried in darkness. I rose slowly to my feet, and the scarcely formed conjecture of my mind was instantly confirmed. As I had expected, I could no longer stand erect; my head now struck the roof. The whole truth flashed at once across my mind. I now saw clearly the explanation of what had before astounded and perplexed me. I saw why the roof did not touch the walls of the enclosure, why it was formed of massive iron.—*It was descending.*

Yes—descending! During the hour I had remained seated, the roof had sunk through a space of fully four inches. But this discovery, when now I made it, so far from causing me perplexity, at once revealed to me the whole mystery of my prison.

The distinctness of sound with which the chiming of the bells reached my ears had already told me that the belfry must be situated directly above my head. I now perceived that what I had taken for a solid heavy roof was in fact the massive and enormous weight of the great clock. I was imprisoned in the bottom of the shaft into which the weight descended. The ponderous block of solid metal was falling at the rate of about four inches in an hour, or rather more. In less time than it takes to trace these words, the consequence of this flashed through my mind. In fifteen hours the weight would descend through a space of five feet. Long before I could expect release, the enormous mass would be upon me, and would crush me helplessly against the pavement of my prison.

My sensations upon making this discovery I will not attempt to describe. Often—very often—in the course of my life, have I had occasion to remark the truth of the saying: "The avenues that lead to death are numerous and strange." Little did I think how nearly I was myself to afford an example of its truth. Yet surely no mortal was ever before the victim of an accident so

wildly singular and so full of horror! There the great weight was above me. Slowly, surely, it was creeping downwards. And slowly and surely it would still creep downwards in the darkness and the silence of the night.

And far up in the soft air of sunset the bells were still ringing the evening hymn.

The suddenness, the unexpectedness of what had happened, had formed no small part of its effect upon my mind. Yet up to this time my adventure, though not such as one would have chosen to undergo, had had nothing in it portentously alarming. It was disagreeable enough, undoubtedly, to be forced against one's will to put up with such a lodging for the night. But what was the discomfort of my situation, had that been the worst it had in store for me, compared with the horror of it now?

For many minutes after making this discovery I remained motionless, striving vainly to realise the most singular yet deadly peril which threatened me. I do not know how long it was before I so far recovered my faculties as to become capable of thought. At length, rousing myself by an effort to examine whether any way of escape lay open to me, I turned my attention to the interspace between the weight and the wall; but it was far, very far, too narrow to admit of the passage of my body. Then—to such extremities may desperation drive its victims—I thought of endeavouring to arrest the great weight by supporting it with my stick as it descended. I might as well have attempted to support a falling avalanche.

Then an idea occurred to my mind which brought with it a gleam of hope. I thought it possible that by applying my strength to the weight itself, I might be able to impart to it by slow degrees a swinging motion, like that of a pendulum; and this being continued, might at length bring the ponderous mass in contact with the door, and so burst it open. Raising myself from the floor of the cell, upon which I had again sunk down, I applied my strength to the weight, and by exerting all my energy in a succession of rhythmical impulses I gradually succeeded in imparting to it an almost imperceptible movement. Gradually this increased; and but for an unforeseen circumstance the scheme might have been successful. But I presently found that the weight did not hang exactly in the centre of the shaft. The consequence of this was that it struck the wall opposite the door before it reached the door itself. The extent of its swing being thus checked, my utmost efforts failed to bring it into contact with the door. The attempt had therefore to be abandoned, and hope again died within me.

Hope died within me. And *now* my sensations were those of extreme horror and dismay. I for the first time felt the *certainty* of my fate. A deadly sickness seized me. In a paroxysm of despair I flung myself again upon the floor of my prison, and lay there without motion.

I will not dwell on the long hours that followed—those hours of more than mortal agony of mind. It happened that I had lately been reading an account of a traveller who had perished in a quicksand. The time of the accident was on a summer evening, when the sun was sinking, and the lonely shore was bathed in rosy light. The spot where it occurred was well known to me—and after reading the account I had endeavoured, in that unreasoning spirit which sometimes leads the mind to dwell on horrors, to realise in fancy the sensations of the victim, as inch by inch and foot by foot, in full sight of the free ocean and the glorious sun, the treacherous quicksand drew him downward—downward—to his doom.

What the sensations attending such a death must be I could then but feebly realise. I know them now.

I know them now. The sensations of those who have stood face to face with death for hours, watching with starting eyes his slow approach, are to me no mystery. But the mind of man has mercifully been so ordered that agony prolonged beyond a certain point ends in benumbing the power of feeling. Thus it is that criminals condemned to execution often sleep soundly and eat with appetite : a fact which seems amazing to those who consider how comparatively slight a degree of mental distress has power to rob the night of rest and to turn the daintiest food to poison. They do not reflect that mental agony in its extremity ceases to be felt. But thus it is—and thus it was with me.

I believe also that the air of the shaft must have acted upon me with some stupefying or bewildering influence, like that of the vapour which often gathers at the bottom of old wells. The agitation of my mind gradually gave place to a strange feeling of indifference. The peril under which I lay ceased to trouble me, and at last no longer occupied my thoughts.

I began instead to be curiously disturbed by another circumstance, very trivial in itself: by a *sound*, which reached my senses from somewhere in the stillness : a sound low, muffled, throbbing and mysterious, like the beating of my own blood. Had my mind been clear I could not long have failed to recognise it for what it was. The sound seemed in my ears ; but this was merely owing to my position in the shaft. In reality, it was the ticking of the great clock, far above my head.

For hours I sat there, listening mechanically, half unconsciously, to this monotonous sound, broken at intervals by the notes of the deep-toned bell. At length, probably owing in great measure to the heaving effect of the air about me, I must have passed into a sort of stupor, which lasted very long.

When I came to myself I was conscious of a very singular sensation. The pitchy darkness was about me, and of course I could *see* nothing. But, in some unaccountable manner, of which I fear it is impossible for me to convey a notion, I was aware that during my

trance the weight had descended a great way, and was now close above my body. I could *feel*, though nothing touched me, the huge and threatening mass brooding over me in the darkness. With a mighty effort—for like a person in a nightmare I seemed to have lost the power of motion—I raised my hand. My expectation was a correct one. My hand struck against the under surface of the weight, at an elevation of less than three inches from my face! At last—after an eternity of unutterable suspense—at last—it touched me.

It touched me. At first lightly; then with a perceptible pressure; then with a pressure which grew distressing. In vain I sought relief; in vain I strove to writhe my body into narrower compass. Slowly, steadily, the mass descended, crushing me against the floor.

The last minutes of my life seemed come. I breathed a prayer to heaven and resigned myself to die. Still a space the weight descended; my brain swam; my breathing became difficult; I believe that for some brief seconds I bore upon my fainting frame the whole burden of the ponderous mass. The blood rushed in torrents to my head, I felt that my senses were leaving me.

Very suddenly the pressure ceased. I was conscious of a welcome relief. I drew in a deep breath, freely. I moved my limbs, and found their liberty no dream. The weight was gone!

I raised my hand, and it encountered space. I staggered, gasping, to my feet. The weight was already above my head, and rising rapidly upwards into the darkness of the shaft. A sound of moving mechanism reached me from above. I thought I heard the murmur of voices; men were moving in the tower above me.

The purpose which had brought them there was evident; *they were winding up the clock.*

It was not until afterwards that I learnt what really had occurred. The clock should have been wound up the day before; but the men whose duty it was to do the winding had overlooked their work, and the oversight was not discovered till late at night. Afraid that the clock would run down, and that they should be blamed, they had come to the cathedral earlier than usual to rectify the error. Had it not been for their neglect of duty, the weight would not have descended nearly so far as it did towards the bottom of the shaft; while, had their visit been delayed but a little longer, they would assuredly have found the clock already stopped—stopped by a cause which *now* I shudder to think of. *Then*—at that moment of relief—I thought of nothing clearly. Giddy, bewildered, reeling with a wild sense of deliverance, the prolonged oppression of my soul found vent in a loud, long, and ringing cry.

I remember little more, and that confusedly. I have some dim memory of an interval of silence, broken by voices outside my prison; of the sudden opening of the door; of a blinding light; of a group of several forms without. I seem to remember also that there were cries of wonder as I staggered from my narrow lodging and fell fainting

into the arms of my deliverers. But these things are to me as the shadows of a dream. The rushing darkness returned upon me, and for many hours I knew no more.

Such is the story of my strange adventure. I greatly doubt whether in all the chapter of accidents in history a stranger can be found. I have already stated that its truth is known to several persons, and that the strict accuracy of my account can be verified by simple enquiry.

IN THE SWEET JUNE TWILIGHT.

Bright, the butterflies that glinted
In the noontide's fervid blaze,
Over poppies, fire tinted,
Poised in seas of golden haze.
Lonely now beside the river,
I recall those by-gone hours,
While the shadowy rushes quiver,
O'er the lilies' folded flowers—
In the sweet June twilight.

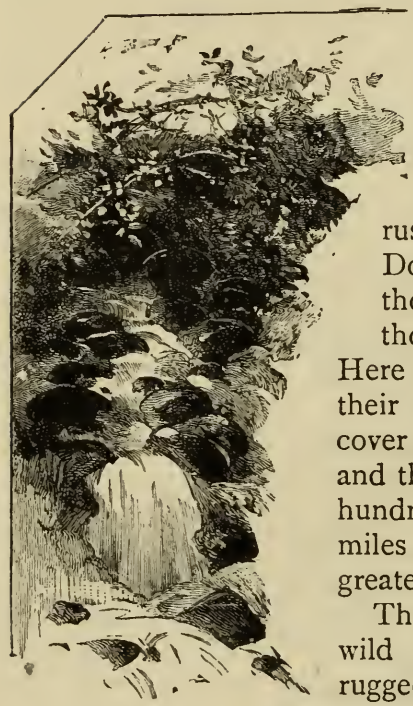
Day has died in rosy splendour,
And o'er dew-bespangled meads
Float soft flutings, low and tender,
From the bird-haunts in the reeds.
And about me, and above me,
Hope builds airy castles bright,
While I think of thee, and love thee,
'Midst the scenes of past delight—
In the sweet June twilight.

Echo fills the fragrant dingle,
Where the tiny glow-worms gleam,
With remembered words that mingle
With the murmur of the stream ;
While about me, and above me,
Lingers still thy presence fair,
And I think of thee, and love thee,
And each thought is voiceless prayer—
In the sweet June twilight.

Helen Marion Burnside

IN SOUND OF MANY WATERS.

By Charles W. Wood, F.R.G.S., Author of "Through Holland," etc.



NORWAY, above all other countries, is the land of waterfalls. America has its Niagara; Switzerland its Schaffhausen; Germany its Gastein; but the waterfalls of Norway are legion. The land seems to have been made for rushing torrents and mountain streams. Down it runs a range of mountains one thousand miles long, sometimes rising nine thousand feet above the level of the sea. Here rivers have their birth and ice-fields their home. Some of these ice-fields will cover an area of five hundred square miles; and those whose area is no more than one hundred or one hundred and fifty square miles or so must not esteem themselves greater than they are.

The shores of Norway correspond with the wild grandeur of its interior. They are rugged, broken, ironbound beyond all other shores; beautiful as a dream; full of change and variety. The sea runs up into the land in channels which form the fjords. They are of all lengths, of all descriptions; now overpowering by their wild, savage, gloomy grandeur; now soothing with luxuriant vegetation, with pine forests, with fields and valleys and farmsteads; with delicious solitudes full of repose, full of a divine essence and influence never to be interpreted by words, but filling the soul with a nameless rapture.

Everywhere there is a sound of many waters. All these fjords have numberless branches; every branch has its river, or torrent, or waterfall, and sometimes the waterfalls are countless. If all could be brought together, all sounds concentrated, it would indeed become a land of rushing mighty waters, even more than it is: a noise that would rival the ocean in its most raging moods.

Steamers now go up these fjords; but the day is not so very far off that you had to take your own boat and row and sail about them; turn into and explore every creek and crevice, and so become intimately acquainted with the hidden beauties of this wonderful land. Those who are wise do so still. But how many are wise? Who has patience and a sufficiently great mind to pass over the rapidity of

steam; and see a little intimately, rather than much on the surface? Who does anything thoroughly in this age? It would take the holidays of a lifetime thus to explore the beauties of Norway, but the result would be a perfect satisfaction, an infinite delight; the consciousness of having done at least one thing well.

The waterfalls of Norway alone are a study. A few are gigantic; but an infinite number that have made no name for themselves yet charm by their beauty as much as the chief falls overawe by force and volume. A long summer devoted to the Hardanger fjord alone would not half exhaust its resources. But you would become acquainted with a few of the greatest torrents of Norway, and with an infinite number of the most beautiful. Day after day would open up fresh wonders. You would live in an ideal world, passing all your dreams of what is fair in Nature; all your hours would be steeped in romance. You might sail and row under the shadow of great mountains; land, and explore untrodden forests; bask in the rays of a hot midsummer sun; take shelter in caves where on the hottest midsummer day the sun never penetrates and water freezes.

The waterfalls of other countries have not a tenth of the attraction possessed by those of Norway. Niagara overwhelms you with its torrent. Millions of tons of water falling every minute into an abyss produce a breathless sensation. You walk beneath the cataract and listen to the mighty roar, and come out at the other end almost deprived of your senses, wondering whether you are a fish or a man.

You gaze upon Schaffhausen from the windows of a charming hotel, where everything is made easy and luxurious. In the dining-room you are waited upon by young ladies, educated and well brought up, the daughters of professional men and others, who go there for the season to be instructed in the mysteries of housekeeping, and to become good wives. Dressed in the rich costume of their country, decked in ornaments of gold and silver, they minister with a refined grace which fills you with silent admiration. Well for you if your stay is limited and you depart heartwhole. Standing in rows near the doorway, involuntarily you make them a courtly bow as you go out, and they return it with a gracious curtsey. They are not handmaidens, but queens holding a court.

From the wide French windows of the dining-room, or on the balcony beyond, you may take your coffee, and look upon that mass of ever falling water. It is a miniature Niagara. Afar-off stretches the long chain of the Alps right down into Italy: peak upon peak, pile beyond pile, flushing rosy red at sunset; a view on which to gaze when dying; a scene worthy of Paradise.

At Gastein the vision is narrowed. Mountains close about you, press you in on every side, weigh down upon you after many days with a sense of suffocation. The waterfall, one of the great falls of Europe, rushes down in one long, mighty torrent through the narrow gorge. It dashes furiously over great boulders, empties itself at the

bottom of a ravine, and then flows through the valleys in a silver stream which for a time becomes strangely calm and peaceful. You cannot escape from the oppression of the mountains; and nervous patients who have gone there in search of health have occasionally been driven mad by the constant mighty rush and roar of the water. The little church on the hill, the religious processions that wind about the hillsides on high days and holy days, would suggest peace to your heart, but in sight and sound of that mighty fall there is no peace.

Amongst all these falls you still feel yourself in the world. To be alone amongst them is impossible. They are too much frequented and sought after: and if anything could make them commonplace or take from their beauty it is the crowds of sightseers that surround you on all sides. At Gastein, it is true, it is a little crowd of invalids, but that only gives it an additional element of melancholy.

But the great waterfalls of Norway are different. They are remote and difficult to reach; they are amidst the mountains; they roar and thunder for ever in desert-like solitudes; you come upon them surrounded by all that is beautiful and wild and romantic in Nature. There are three falls of the first magnitude in Norway: the Vöringfos, the Skjeggedalsfos, and the Rjukenfos. The first two are in the neighbourhood of the Hardanger. The third we shall only mention by name. It has nothing to do with the Hardanger. It is less remote, requires less labour to be seen, but it is situated in a district of most stupendous, overwhelming beauty.

For the Vöringfos you may if you please sail up the Hardanger, and absolutely revel in the surrounding wonders. You may bask in the sunshine, watch the shadows lengthening on the hillsides, the gloom of the forests deepening; gaze upon the rainbows formed by the ascending spray from innumerable waterfalls; watch the twilight gather and the stars come out one by one to find their reflection in the calm waters over which you are gliding.

At the very end of one of the short branches of the Hardanger—the Eidfjord—you come to Vik. It is a wild, barren spot. High, frowning mountains surround you. This might be the end of the world. Years ago a solitary farmhouse, rough and rude, some four thousand feet above the level of the sea was the only shelter found by the traveller—like so many of the present shelters in other parts of Norway. Now the farm-house has become a more civilised inn kept by two brothers. But before reaching the Vöringfos you have work before you. The brothers Næsheim, who keep the inn, having done their best, send you on your way rejoicing. About a mile's walk through all this wild scenery, these frowning mountains, brings you to Eidfjordvandet. Nothing is more romantic than these remote mountain lakes. Here you take boat, and a short row lands you at Saebo. Again you might fancy yourself at the end of the world. A great wall of rock confronts you. Its size and majesty are almost appalling; fill one with awe. In the distance snowy peaks rise

VÖRINGFOS.

heavenwards, some 6,000 or 7,000 feet high. Go when you will, these eternal snows will greet you. The sun seems to have no power upon them, except to make them glitter like white robes studded with diamonds. There is a good deal of moorland about here; marshy ground where snipe shooting ought to be abundant.

If you are a good walker you will go on foot up to the fall. Once upon a time there was nothing else for it but to walk. Now there is a bridle road up the gloomy, grand ravine, to Maabö farm, where you may change your brave little sure-footed horse for another equally good and trustworthy. The torrent of the Bjoreia rushes madly down the gorge, now on your right hand and now on your left. You are in sound of many waters.

At length you hear a mighty thundering, and immediately after, almost without warning, find yourself in front of the celebrated Vöringfos. Closed in by perpendicular walls of rock, surrounding it almost like an amphitheatre, a witch's cauldron too great for the largest race of giants ever known, the great volume of water for ever leaps the chasm in a clear fall of some six hundred feet. The roar and weight of water are tremendous. If you wish to see the fall from above you must take a different route from Maabö, where the valley seems to have been cleft in two. The upper road will lead you through a long stretch of moorland, wild and desolate until you reach Höl farm, which is close to the fall.

The best position for looking down upon it is from a slippery rock, made smooth by ancient glacial action, shelving towards the cataract, undermined by the water and overhanging the boiling foam. If your head is strong enough to bear it you may stand on the edge of this rock and look over into the awful cauldron. Or you may throw yourself down and crawl to the edge like a lizard, and watch the rushing torrent and the whirling foam and the clouds of spray. The horrible feeling of wanting to throw yourself over, which seems common to all, will seize you, and you slip backwards in terror of your life. You can trace the course of the water, which, having taken its fearful leap, goes onwards down the gorge, and you feel once more, as you feel so often in Norway, that you are in the midst of rushing mighty waters. Not half so sublime and terrific would they be without all this accompaniment of savage Nature, these everlasting, immovable rocks, these towering, frowning mountains.

Further up the Hardanger, branching off into the Sörfjord, you come to Odde. It is the very end of the fjord. I do not know that Odde in itself is so beautiful and striking as the places it leads to. There are good hotels as far as the buildings are concerned, but when there we were simply half starved. It was all outward show, and we never had one good meal in Odde—with one exception which we shall come to presently.

We started one hot and brilliant morning for the Skjeggedalsfos: also called the Ringedalsfos: one of the three largest falls in Norway, and the second in point of beauty. It was a serious undertaking, involving ten or twelve hours' hard work. We were a party of six or seven, for we had made pleasant friends on the road, as one may do in Norway above all other countries. Day after day, people journeying the same way are thrown together, and if they happen to "synchronise," the pleasures of travelling are proportionately increased. It was so in this instance. The ladies were charming; we had our Rector to keep us in order, though he added immensely to our fun and amusement; we started well provisioned, in the highest of spirits consistent with respectability.

We climbed the steep ascent above Odde. The river rushed and foamed beside our path with the speed and strength of a torrent. We crossed it on the old bridge, where children stood with plates of mountain strawberries, and if these could be resisted, the great blue eyes, the silent appeals of the little folk, could not. We looked down upon Odde, sleeping in the plain at the head of the lake: a cluster of wooden houses, bright and cheerful, gilded by the sunshine, rich in cherry gardens full of fruit ripe and luscious. The church spire pointed skywards, but though we spent a Sunday there, we had no service and saw no costumes. The clergyman has three churches to minister unto, and so service is held at Odde once in three weeks.

Just beyond the bridge we took boat across the lake, which is so much higher than the fjord, and supplies the short, rushing river that empties itself into the Hardanger with a sound of many waters. Strong men rowed us swiftly across. The valley here is pretty broad, and as you journey onwards you find it is one of the loveliest in Norway, commanding some of the finest and grandest views. It is made musical by waterfalls which run down the mountain sides, some of them all white foam and feathery spray: fall following fall, beautiful as a vision. The whole valley is one of the most interesting in Norway, leading you over mountain passes white with eternal snows broken with the track of the reindeer, into wild, rugged, half-civilised Thelemarken.

But to-day we merely rowed across the lake and landed at the foot of the Tyssedal. It is on the right, and the mountains seem to divide in a narrow cleft of wonderfully romantic and wild beauty for the express purpose of making you a way up to the Skjeggedalsfos. Here began our real work: truly a labour of love: truly seeking the picturesque under difficulties. We had a hard, mountainous walk before us of two or three hours. Every step was a toil and counted for three ordinary steps. It was steep and arduous from the beginning, but broad and open where we first landed, overshadowed by pine trees which cast grateful shadows upon our zigzag path.

This soon disappeared. The gorge narrowed, the mountains drew together. It was wild and savage and desolate in the extreme. The

BUXDALSFOS.

NEBBEDAL.

ESPALANDSFOS.

NEAR ODDE.

river or mountain torrent ran at the bottom of the valley over its rocky bed, through briar and tangle, occasionally lost in the small fir trees that often fringed our way. Sometimes we were as much as a thousand feet above it, and looked down the marvellous precipice upon a scene inconceivably wild and grand. Gazing back from such a height we had a distant view of the Folgefond, its snow peaks and ice fields pure and beautiful and far off, like a bride-cake spread for the marriage feast of celestial beings. Our path, always wild and rugged, sometimes led us over great surfaces of slanting rock that required all our dexterity to cross; rocks rendered smooth and slippery by glacial action. The mountains were ever about us, now fir-clad, like "forests upon a thousand hills," now rugged, barren and rocky. The valley never widened.

It was very hard work, seemingly interminable. We waited for the end as night watchers for the morning. Yet the beauty of our way kept us up. If occasionally we grew footsore our spirits never flagged. How could they? We were going through all that is grandest and most inspiring on earth. The ladies of our party were the bravest and most untiring of all. Every now and then if an ominous silence fell upon the toilers, Miss F. with her magic wand would exorcise us back to freshness and vigour and cheerfulness; and wit and wisdom would once more flow from the Rector upon his appreciative hearers.

On and on we went, up pathways and down pathways, scaling rocks, resting awhile on fallen trees, now and then stealing a glance at our watches. We all declared we were growing more and more fresh and ethereal. "L'appétit vient en mangeant," why not strength in walking? If we occasionally thought that all this had to be gone through again some four or five hours hence, we put the sensation from us; or rather we gloried in the idea that this was only the first half of a very delightful day in our lives.

At length the first stage of our pilgrimage was over. We reached Skjeggedal farm; a desolate mountain farm, rough and rude, kept by people not too civilised. There was one poor deformed creature, the sight of whom was a nameless horror which made us turn away. But we noticed that our Rector went up to him and spoke to him kindly and considerately, showing forth a charity that did honour to his calling. It was one of life's roadside lessons, small and insignificant in itself, but of more use than a sermon.

At the farm we found men to row us across the two mountain lakes lying between us and the fall. The first lake was short and soon over. We landed on a strip of marshy ground where grew Multerberg, which sent E. into ecstasies that every Norwegian feels at the sight of the yellow fruit, just as the Savoyard is affected by the vision of his mountains.

Then came the second lake which was to see the end of our journey: a lake wild and grand, four or five miles long. The mountains

towered around us, gloomy and barren, descending sometimes almost perpendicularly to the water. Here again we caught sight of the distant Folgefond, white, beautiful and distant. To our left we came upon the Twin Fall, so lovely and feathery that for a moment we almost fancied this the celebrated Skjeggedalsfos. But it was only one of the minor falls that seem to multiply themselves in Norway.

Presently we heard the roar of rushing mighty waters, and then all at once, in a corner of the lake, surrounded by perpendicular walls of rock, we saw the great Skjeggedalsfos. From the very first moment it was infinitely beautiful. It has not the ponderous mass of water possessed by the Vöringfos; it has not quite its wild, breathless rush and roar; but the water falls in more beautiful folds and forms, and the spray rises in more ethereal clouds.

Our boat shot up to the shore and we landed. There was a small settlement of wooden houses or huts here; a sufficiency of green turf on which to spread our table and enjoy our Arcadian, well-earned repast. But first we went up to the fall for a long, long look. We would have the flow of soul before the feast of reason.

It was worth all our toil. Like the Vöringfos, it is almost surrounded by rocky, perpendicular walls. The water, in great volume, takes a leap of some 700 feet, falling in forms and shapes of exquisite beauty. Of the greater falls it is perhaps the most graceful. The water constantly takes designs of almost lace-work delicacy, for ever changing and varying. Its foam is white as the driven snow. It deafens you with its roar. Its spray scatters far and near, and you must keep at a distance if you do not wish to be wet through for your return journey. You were melting with heat during your walk, but now, under the shadow of the fall, you shiver with cold.

Once more you are in sound of many waters. You cannot tear yourself away from them. Great fragments of slippery rock, smooth and wet with spray, are in all directions. Ferns grow about them. You have to pilot yourself amongst them as best you can, and if you tumble into a crevice you must not expect anyone to jeopardise his own safety by coming to your rescue. It is recorded of a public school monitor that when he was drowning, the third time he rose he had the presence of mind to cry out "Fag!" and two fags had to jump in reluctantly to the rescue. But here there is no fag at hand: and everyone does not possess the kindly spirit of our Rector, who constantly placed the happiness and welfare of others before his own. If all the travellers one met were actuated by this same spirit of consideration what a charm would be added to one's wanderings. Especially in these days when travellers are legion. But this spirit in its universality is not for the fashion of this world.

To-day we none of us fell into cracks and crevices; but presently, within sight and sound of the fall, assembled round the festive board; a board fit for Titania. The ladies put down umbrellas and dis-

carded mackintoshes, with which they had braved the spray of the torrent. Miss F. laying aside her magic wand, charmed with the magic of her words and smiles. Miss N. dispensed all sorts of favours and delicacies, and served with a kindly spirit that proved her to be both Martha and Mary in one; and I fear that just at that moment the virtues of Martha were appreciated beyond their measure. B. sent round the loving cup, not by any means reserving to himself the largest portion.

What could be greater happiness? The lake spread before us its calm, gloomy, deep-looking waters. Mountains towered on all sides. We were shut in by them; shut out from the world. The mighty waterfall poured down all its torrent and beauty for us. We had the place absolutely to ourselves, enjoyed our repose, renewed our strength. The tug of war was yet to come. We had, as it were, reversed matters, and the Hill of Difficulty had still to be climbed. Presently a boat was seen approaching with a fresh cargo of pilgrims. We were about to depart, and congratulated ourselves upon our earlier march. As they landed we set off again. We were leaving enchanted ground, and bid farewell, a long, silent farewell, to the waterfall. Probably we should never see it again, even though we paid Norway many a subsequent visit.

We started across the lake in full view of the far-off Folgefond, and in admiration of the Twin Fall, even after all the grandeur and beauty of the greater fall. In due time we reached the Skjeggedal farm, where we refreshed ourselves with coffee, taken in a barn-like room and roughly served. But any room or no room, so that we had coffee, would have been equally welcome in the midst of this stupendous scenery. One felt very out of the world, for it required a pilgrimage to get back into it. But we started bravely upon our long and difficult walk, and if anyone's heart sank a little at the prospect, no one else knew anything about it.

And bravely we kept it up to the end. Before it was over the way certainly seemed long drawn out, and we thought less of the beauties of Nature than of a certain small cottage bordering the lake below, where we hoped to find rest and refreshment. At least one of the party finished up with an inevitable splitting headache. There was a little less music in the rush of the river, a little less grandeur in the rugged, pine-clad mountains. But in spite of headache and fatigue—we had now been undergoing hard labour for nine or ten hours—the walk left behind it an impression never to be forgotten. And by-and-by the mountains widened, and we reached the zig-zag road and passed into the shade of the pines.

There lay the lake, and our boat, and the rowers; and there was our desired haven, the cottage, with its door hospitably open. But its resources were few. At first we feared we should get nothing; our hearts fainted within us. The woman, young and smiling, made us welcome, but she could not do the impossible. We

SLETTAFOS.

went into a quaint, old-fashioned room, with plain rough furniture and small windows, and no fire on the hearth. But we found she could make us coffee if we would wait, and we had biscuits with us, remnant of our Arcadian repast. She went up the garden into an outhouse and we followed her; the Rector, B. and the writer. There we gathered sticks and lighted a fire, and helped her to boil the kettle. The ladies sat in state in the reception room, and E. kept watch and ward over them with Norwegian chivalry; and they all waited in faith and hope.

Presently we reappeared; and no boar was ever carried into ancient feast with greater triumph than we displayed in announcing our aromatic beverage. Headaches vanished and smiles wreathed themselves; the glass of life once more ran in golden sands. We set our Rector in the middle of the room and sat round him like a devoted, attentive flock. Fragrant steam arose from our cups, and as there was one cup short, B. took the sugar basin. This was the one grateful meal alluded to in an earlier page. No coffee ever had the flavour of that brew. It put new life into us, and once more set flowing the sources of fun and mirth. The Rector gave us no sermon—he was a sermon in himself—but we felt in charity with all men.

All too soon we found ourselves shooting across the lake, approaching the old bridge which was our last landing stage. There were the same children holding out apparently the very same mountain strawberries, looking at us with the same appealing eyes. We passed down beside the rushing, rugged torrent, and finally came to an anchor at the hotel. It had been a day to be remembered, though not the only day, and not the only excursion that made our stay in Odde memorable.

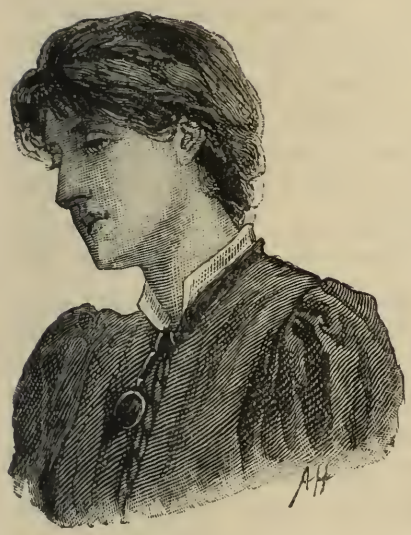
Norway abounds in these rushing mighty waters. They make music in our ears for ever. We have only to think about them and we see them and hear them. We see the deep gorges, the towering pine-clad hills. We remember days that were made happy by special experiences and pleasant friends. Over the sound of the waters floats the music of voices and laughter, and scraps of conversation that took an unexpected turn or brought out a kindly thought. There is a sense of cool spray and pleasant breezes and sparkling sunshine lurking in the memory. The heart is stirred to an emotion that has a ring of sadness in it inevitable to all past happiness. The twin genii of Pleasure and Pain go hand in hand through life. We must have our shadows to bring out our sunshine.

After all, these rushing mighty waters are an emblem of ourselves. We are tossed about on life's stormy ocean; tossed and driven and shipwrecked, but escaping with our lives. Until at last, spent and broken, disillusioned, having drunk of our water of Meribah, our apples turned to ashes and our harps unstrung, we glide into a Haven where there is no Yesterday and no To-morrow, but the everlasting To-day, the eternal Present.

THE PIPE OF PEACE.

By C. Haddon Chambers, Author of "The Major."

I.



BERTRAM and Conway Osborne were more than brothers—they were staunch friends. The death of their mother when they were both too young to understand, much less to measure the extent of their loss; the indifference and neglect of their father, a cold and selfish egotist; the absence of brothers and sisters to create domestic cliques and engender estrangement; dispositions which harmonised, and many other circumstances combined to lay in childhood the foundation of an affection which the subsequent assaults of time and trial only served to strengthen.

A year, so terribly short to the middle-aged, is very long and important in the life of a child.

Only twelve months divided Bertram and Conway, and at seven Bertram was the guide, instructor and protector, while his little companion looked up to him with becoming veneration. It was Bertram who planned their adventures and directed their sports; it was to him that the younger, and, at that age, frailer boy looked for comfort in distress and assistance when weary.

But as the years went on these conditions underwent a change, slow but certain. At the ages of thirteen and twelve respectively, the brothers were of equal height and strength, and three years later Conway had developed into a vigorous youth, powerful for his age, and an inch taller than his brother. Bertram was in fact destined never to exceed the medium height and average strength, while it was Conway's fortune to be gifted in his maturity with six feet of splendidly proportioned manhood.

At Harrow, Conway thrashed a hitherto unconquered bully who had dared to insult his brother, and Bertram secretly coached his champion so that they might go up to college together. At Oxford Conway presented a stalwart bargeman with a pair of black eyes for having knocked his brother down during a street broil; and Bertram put the brake on his studies so that the inseparables might have the satisfaction of being plucked in company.

When they returned home subsequently with their triumphs, their

father, who was deep in a realistic French author at the time, scarcely gave them a second glance, and returned to his novel. The brothers decided upon a visit to the Continent. When the young men returned home, more firmly attached to each other than ever, after rambling for a year, they were separated for the first time.

Bertram, very much against his inclination, was sent to London to enter political life under the auspices of a prominent member of the House, an old friend of his father's. Conway was directed for the present to remain at home—which was a small estate in Hertfordshire, known as the Ferns. Mr. Osborne had never engaged actively in politics, or for that matter in any other pursuit except that of pleasure, but he was under a promise of many years' standing to attach himself to a certain party, and it was to avoid further embarrassing importunity that he now sacrificed the inclinations of his eldest son. The stalwart Conway, he reasoned, would relieve him of a great deal of trouble in managing the estate.

"Good-bye, Bertie," said Conway, feeling rather ashamed of his abortive attempt to speak lightly, as he wrung his brother's hand at the railway station. "I shall be most horribly dull without you. The governor's not very congenial society, you know. You have the best of the bargain, for you're bound to get excitement of some sort or other in town. And perhaps," with a jealous pang, "you'll make a new chum."

"No fear of that, Con," replied Bertram, heartily. "I'll meet lots of fellows, of course, but I shall never have but the one chum."

They had shaken hands several times, the train came up and Bertram jumped into it. "All aboard!" cried the guard, facetiously, waving his flag. Another grip of the hands and Conway stood alone on the little platform, looking dimly after the fast-receding train. When it had disappeared he left the station without hearing the porter's suggestive salutation, "It's very chilly to-day, sir," and drove home, making up his mind on the way to seize the very first excuse of a run up to town.

As he had anticipated, Conway found life at the Ferns, without his brother, very slow. He found upon a little investigation that the estate, with the assistance of an old and prosy steward whose probity was sans reproche, managed itself very comfortably, and he wisely decided that interference on his part would simply serve to display his own ignorance. There was a trout stream and an abundance of game, but he found such things stale and unprofitable without Bertram. Eventually he decided that if boredom was inevitable he might just as well take it on horseback as on foot. Accordingly he selected a stout roadster, on which he explored the neighbouring country.

On one of his dismal rides he met the parson of a neighbouring parish, who asked him to dinner. Parson Helden had frequently asked Mr. Osborne to dinner, but that gentleman, being timid of

placing his digestion, which of late years had been far from robust, at the mercy of a local cook, had made excuses. Conway being more polite, less dainty, and thoroughly weary of his own society, gladly accepted the invitation.

When, on the following evening, he presented himself at the parsonage, and received a hearty welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Helden, Conway experienced no regrets ; and when Miss Helden entered the room and was introduced his feelings were akin to those of the settler who suddenly discovers that the piece of land on which he has failed to raise crops is richly auriferous.

For Miss Helden was a vision of loveliness. She was petite, with a slender, supple form just ripening into womanly beauty. Her small head was crowned with a mass of hair the colour of virgin gold, cunningly arranged in a manner to display its uncommon wealth to the greatest advantage. Her large eyes both in colour and in softness plainly said " Forget-me-not," an entreaty which Conway decided from the first moment was quite superfluous ; while the long lashes which fringed them and the thick eyebrows above—too thick, perhaps, for absolute perfection—were several shades darker than her hair.

If her features were not strictly regular they were none the less bewitching for that. Your classical beauty is often apt to lack expression ; Una Helden bewildered you with a hundred new charms of face in an hour, notwithstanding that her nose might have been more exquisitely chiselled, and her mouth less richly developed. But no one had ever ventured to suggest a blemish in the beauty of the parson's daughter. One glance from the " Forget-me-not " eyes, one quiver of the heavily fringed lids, and the critic who came to criticise remained to adore. Men may admire the pale, faultless, spirituelle loveliness, but it is the intensely human, seductive beauty, such as Una Helden possessed, that sets their hearts aflame.

From that evening Conway found life at the Ferns more tolerable, and he missed the companionship of his brother less, although it is probable that he would have knocked the man down who ventured to hint such a thing to him. But after all, what could be more natural ? He was young, and deeply, passionately in love. Cannot a great love for a woman and a great friendship for a man live peacefully side by side in a man's heart ? A man would answer the question in the affirmative, a woman in the negative. Not, necessarily, that the feminine heart is smaller, but because it is more concentrative—because it contains but one chamber, and when that is filled there is room for nought else. The sentiment of friendship, as it is understood by men, is almost unknown among women, and they are suspicious and jealous of it accordingly.

Conway was bewitched. He saw Una Helden daily ; he would not have missed a day for the wealth of the Indies. The sun might burn up the grass ; the rain might flood the valleys ; the hurricane

might lay low the forest trees; but at some time during the twenty-four hours the young man would have presented himself at the parsonage. Love at twenty-two laughs scornfully at the elements and defies them.

The brothers maintained a regular correspondence, and be it recorded to his credit, Conway's passion did not make him neglectful in that respect. He still wrote as warmly and as frequently as ever, but for the first time in his life he withheld a confidence from his brother. It was very unwise, and certainly a deviation from the principles which had always governed their friendship. Conway said nothing in his letters about Una, lest, as he naïvely and foolishly reasoned to himself, "Old Bert might be jealous."

At the end of three weeks, during which he walked, talked, rode, played tennis and spent nearly all his time with Miss Helden, Conway was unable to determine how far, if at all, he had won his way into the young lady's affections. One evening an unmistakably tender glance, or a lingering, regretful softness in the good-bye would send him home in an ecstasy of happiness; the next morning he would be greeted as though in the meantime his idol had forgotten the fact of his existence.

The truth, however painful, must be told: Una was a most accomplished coquette. An occasional visit in the season to Aunt Rachel, a relative in London who was "in society," had afforded her opportunities of perfecting the dangerous gift Nature had bestowed upon her, opportunities of which Una had fully availed herself. Conway was some distance down in the list of Una's captures.

"I think, Maria," remarked the parson to his spouse, one Sunday morning as they walked home from church some paces in the rear of the young couple: "I think that young Osborne is, to say the least of it, palpably attentive to our child."

Mr. Helden's tone was that of a man who had just discovered an interesting phenomenon.

"So do I," replied the wife, laconically.

"He is a fine, manly young fellow," continued the parson, after a thoughtful pause, "and he will have a tolerable fortune—probably in cash. It would not be a bad match for Una."

"Not bad; but not particularly brilliant considering Una's beauty and accomplishments. Rachel tells me that she could number her admirers in London by the score. Now if it were the other brother ——"

"Maria, I fear you are terribly worldly," remonstrated the parson, gently. "Remember that all things are ordered for the best. Our innocent child's affections"—the fond parents often spoke of Una as their "innocent child"—"will not be influenced by mundane considerations; although," he added gravely, after another pause, "it is of course your duty to give her the benefit of your experience and advice."

That very afternoon Mrs. Helden acted upon her husband's gentle suggestion.

"Una, my dear, do you think Conway Osborne is in love with you?"

"I am sure of it, mamma," was the answer, soft but decisive.

"And do you reciprocate his feelings?"

"I am not sure of that, mamma." And Una's face at that moment fully justified the expression, "our innocent child." "I don't think I shall know until I have seen Bertram."

Mrs. Helden, recognising the influence of Aunt Rachel, who was more "in the world," though perhaps not actually more worldly than herself, felt that a responsibility had been lifted from her shoulders, and said nothing more.

Bertram was coming home, and Una knew it, for Conway had told her. He had not volunteered the information; Una had gently pumped it out of him. She had also heard that Bertram was a "grand old fellow," and a "perfect brick," and she had permitted herself to display a curiosity—a childish curiosity of course—to see the absent paragon.

On the day after the two brief conversations just recorded Conway made his way to the parsonage with a firm purpose in his heart. Ostensibly the object of his visit was a game of tennis with Miss Una; in reality it was to put an end once for all to the miserable uncertainty regarding the relations which were to exist between them. For weeks and weeks she had, in her own pretty, infantine, cruel way, played fast and loose with him. He now vowed that it must end at once, for he could bear the torture no longer. Bertram would arrive at the Ferns in the morning, and would remain for a month, and Conway felt that he could not be the jolly companion that his brother expected if he remained in his then state of mind. It must be Yes or No that very afternoon.

Una was pleased to accord her lover a kind welcome. She was in one of her brightest moods, which made Conway's gravity and pre-occupation more marked. They played tennis for half an hour, and then Una threw down her bat, declaring that he was too horribly dull to be endured, and that she would leave him to bore himself. Conway suggested that they should sit in the arbour and talk, but the young lady, scenting his deep design afar off, made for the house.

But Conway was too quick for her. Resolutely imprisoning her tiny hands he led her to the arbour, and gently pressed her into a seat. Then he stood before her, with brows gravely contracted and an eager, anxious, yearning expression upon his handsome face, looking into her great Forget-me-not eyes—which gazed up wonderingly and innocently at him—and trying to read the thoughts that lay within their depths.

He could read nothing, poor fellow! And after all, she looked such a veritable child with her straw tennis-hat bedecked with blue

ribbon thrown back on her small head, and her dead-gold tresses escaping from their bondage, that he had not heart to speak as seriously to her as he had intended. "You are my prisoner, Una," he said, still holding her hands in his.

"So it seems," she replied, laughing. Then, with a bold determination to hasten what she felt to be inevitable, she added: "What ransom do you require, Signor Brigand?"

"Yourself, Una, yourself—to be my wife. I love you with all my soul," he went on, passionately. "It began when I first saw you, and it has gone on increasing ever since until it has become too big for me to restrain. But I know you have seen it in my face, have heard it in my voice for days and weeks. And you have shut your eyes to it and not given me one little peep at your heart to see if it was returned. But I must know now, dear."

"Now you are making game of me," said Una, pettishly, trying to withdraw her hands.

"I fear it has been the other way," replied Conway, somewhat reproachfully. "But it's time now that the game was called. I must know how I stand to-day."

"And suppose I don't choose to enlighten you?"

"But you must choose to enlighten me," cried Conway, angrily. "I'm not a boy, to be trifled with. The most beautiful woman on earth shall not make a tennis ball of my love."

Una rose to her feet and struggled to release her hands, but she was unable to, so firmly did he hold them. Her face had changed, and now wore an expression that Conway had never seen before. Her eyes were contracted and their colour was deeper, while her trembling lips were unpleasantly contorted. For the moment the latent demon that lay unsuspected at the girl's heart had broken from control. Una was not beautiful then.

"No you are not a boy to be trifled with," she said, tauntingly. "You are a man; a great, strong, brave man, with the power and will to bully and coerce a weak woman; a courtly, gallant, chivalric man; in fact a gentleman."

Conway turned pale to the lips. Releasing her hands, he stepped back, still, however, barring her exit from the arbour.

"I am at least an honest man," he said, simply. "I have not the art of concealing my feelings, nor the inclination to do so. I am not practised in deceit. Because I love much I am vehement in the expression of it. Some people prefer vehemence to self-control, as being honester. I ask you once more, Una—do you love me? If you are honest you will answer me Yes or No. If you are not honest —I will never willingly look upon you again."

"Another threat! What a dangerous fellow you are, Con." This extraordinary young girl, whose mood was as changeable as the wind, was soft and smiling now—the Una as she was best known. "I'm sure that you must have practised just a little deceit, for you have

never given me the slightest reason to suspect that you are the volcano you have shown yourself to be to-day. Now don't look black, but come and walk in the garden like a reasonable being, and when I've collected my poor scattered senses I'll answer your question."

"You will answer me honestly?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"I will, from my heart."

They paced the garden silently for some minutes, Una with her head bent, and her hands behind her, kicking up the gravel at each step with the point of her tiny shoe—and Conway, his anger, but not his anxiety, having flown, looking down at her golden head, wondering how much of the woman, and how much of the child there was in this inexplicable little being.

Suddenly Una paused, and looking up demurely into his face, said: "Now repeat your question, please."

"Una, do you love me?" he asked, slowly and earnestly.

"Truly and honestly and from my heart I reply"—she stopped for a moment as he bent over her eagerly—"I don't know."

Then she sprang lightly from him, and fled with a swiftness that defied pursuit towards the house.

As he watched her till she disappeared Conway muttered a hasty word. The best of us are impatient of being tricked. It wounds our self-love, which is the most enduring if not always the strongest of our passions. There was as much hatred and contempt as love for Una in Conway's heart at that moment.

"Bah!" he muttered again, "women are cheats—and men are fools." A cynical observation for a youth of twenty-two, but the tenterhooks upon which he had been kept dangling for the last few weeks had aged Conway wonderfully. "I'm glad it's over," he continued, looking the reverse of glad; "and, thank God! old Bert will be down to-morrow."

Then, to prove to his own satisfaction that he really was indifferent and light-hearted and not in the least upset, he took up a bat and began to strike the balls over the net. They all went over the net, and also over the hedge some distance beyond, and were lost in the adjacent corn-field. When the supply of balls was exhausted he threw the bat in the air several times, catching it dexterously by the handle as it descended. Then he tossed it away on the grass, picked up the walking-stick he had left on a garden seat, and whistling with ostentatious cheerfulness walked off towards the front gate. As he passed under the shadow of the house he heard a small, soft voice calling him.

"Con! Con! Con!—Conway!"

Conway whistled louder, and walked on.

"Con—way!!"

This time he could not fail to hear. The call was louder than his whistling, and decidedly more musical.

"I beg your pardon, U——Miss Helden; you called me?"

Una laughed gaily. She was leaning from a little window just out of her lover's reach, with her face between her hands, and her arms resting on the sill.

"'Miss Helden' is beautiful," she said, unconscious of the double construction that might be placed on her words. "How absurd that you should be the first to call me anything but Una. Do I look more than a simple Christian name?"

Conway was fain to acknowledge to himself that she did not; but he said nothing nor relaxed his gravity.

"Yes, I called you," she continued, "because I won't allow you to go away angry with me."

"I am not angry with you but with myself," he said, coldly.

"And very properly so. I'm glad to see that you still have a conscience. Con!"—and her voice sank to inexpressible softness—"you should not be hasty and unkind to me. I couldn't answer your question honestly in any other way. You must have patience with me, Con. At present I only *think*—perhaps before long I shall be *sure*. I'm only a baby, you know."

It is not surprising that Conway relented under those soft words and still softer voice, both of which so plainly said, "You may hope!" As he looked up he saw the crystal tears gathering in her eyes, and he thereupon felt that ten years' hard labour would have been a lenient sentence for his brutality.

"Forgive me, Una, dear. I'm afraid I was born a rough animal. I promise to be more gentle and patient in future."

"And you will come and see me again very soon?"

"Yes. The day after to-morrow, if you like."

"And bring your wonderful 'old Bert' with you?"

"Yes, and bring my wonderful 'old Bert,'" he answered, smiling, and tossing up a rose to her. And so they parted in peace.

But Conway as he wended his way to the Ferns did not walk on air, as successful lovers are popularly supposed to do. On the contrary, he trod the more prosaic and substantial road like any of his father's cottagers, only on this occasion more slowly and thoughtfully. He was thinking less of the great tear-brightened, forget-me-not eyes, the ripe, tender mouth, and the small beautiful face with its halo of gold hair that he had just left, than of the weeks of coquetry that had drawn him on and ensnared him, and the pitiful trick by means of which Una had evaded the direct reply that his simple avowal of love deserved. He was so honest himself that he could endure nothing that approached deceit in those he loved. Perhaps in this respect the constant companionship of his brother had spoilt him, or at any rate left his nature too tender for a man to live at ease in this world of small and big deceits. The words "only a baby" kept ringing doubtfully in his ears. "Only a baby," he repeated, as he passed through the big gates of the Ferns. "And I certainly have no genius for nursing!"

II.

At the railway station again. The train rolls in, and once more the strong right hands of the brothers are joined. They have so much to say that they prefer to walk to the Ferns, and arm in arm they stroll along, Bertram for the most part doing the talking, and Conway the listening. Bertram had got over his repugnance for politics, but he had conceived a sturdy dislike for the party to whom his father had introduced him, and for their principles, and he was on the eve of casting his lot with the enemy. A general election was looming in the near future, and he had great hopes of securing a seat in the House. Conway entered into his brother's hopes and fears, and listened to a great number of experiences and adventures with profound interest. In return he had nothing interesting to relate, unless he spoke of Una. But that was a confidence he preferred to postpone for the time, especially in view of the distressing uncertainty that prevailed regarding his relations with that young lady.

On the following morning, however, Conway, remembering his promise to Una, proposed a visit to the parsonage.

"Una Helden is an awfully jolly girl," he affirmed—how beautifully comprehensive and conveniently vague that expression is—"and a capital tennis player. I think I mentioned her in one of my letters," he added, with an audacity very foreign to his nature.

"Did you? I don't remember," replied Bertram, unsuspiciously.

Una was at home, of course. She expected them, and her cunningly simple toilet was more studiously simple and more becoming than usual, although Conway, being short-sighted in such matters, did not remark it. Bertram had met many beauties in the season that had just passed, but he had seen no such original loveliness as Una's. She made even a stronger impression upon him than she had upon Conway when he had first seen her.

Una exerted herself to please that afternoon; but it was not for Conway's benefit, and the young man saw it. He knew Una pretty well now, and, although his passion was by no means dead, he more than suspected her sincerity, and was inclined to form but a moderate estimate of her moral calibre.

"She's the sweetest girl I ever met," declared Bertram, enthusiastically, as they walked home, "and by far the most beautiful. It's a marvel to me, Con, that you haven't fallen head over heels in love with her."

"Perhaps I'm not very impressionable," was Conway's evasive answer. Evasion with his brother! Una, you had even then much to answer for!

Unconsciously Bertram felt relieved. If Conway had not fallen in love with Una, nothing stood in the way of his doing so, and something told him that that was not an improbable contingency.

"I don't think that Una would be a very safe girl to fall in love with,"

continued Conway, with affected lightness. His loyalty urged him to warn his brother, while his sensitiveness restrained him from saying too much, lest he should afterwards appear in the unpleasant position of the fox in the fable.

"Why so?" asked Bertram, quickly.

"Because I fancy there's—what shall I say? A want of depth and solidity in her character. She strikes me as being naturally something of a coquette."

"Nonsense, old boy. You're no judge of women. The child is artlessness idealised."

A mental Humph! A painful, anxious one, and Conway said no more.

What need to linger here in this veracious history? The story is a sadly old and tatter-torn one: the story of a fair, false woman with an exterior to love and a soul to hate; a canker-worm hid in a blush-rose. Una fascinated Bertram Osborne at first sight, and she knew it. From that moment Conway was numbered among the numerous fleeting flirtations, and she made up her mind to marry the elder brother.

Conway saw it, and suffered alone. With his love for his brother and his love for Una, it was a hard case with him. In a few days he saw that Bertram's whole soul was bound up in the girl; and then he went out alone, sought a lonely place in the woods, and fought with himself. It was a great battle, the hardest by far he had ever fought, the longest and most fierce. But he came out a victor. No school bully ever received such a thorough and complete thrashing as Conway that day gave himself.

III.

THAT same evening Bertram announced that he was going to ask Una to be his wife, and Conway took his hand and said: "Bert, old boy, the greatest happiness that man could have, whatever it may be, I wish to you."

Conway had avoided the parsonage of late, but chancing to meet Una face to face in the village one day he was obliged to stop and speak to her. After the awkward interchange of a few commonplaces between them, he suddenly said seriously:

"Una, I loved you once, and you trifled with me. My brother loves you now, and you know he is very dear to me. You will make old Bert happy, won't you, Una? He well deserves it."

"Indeed I will try hard," she replied. "And you forgive me now, don't you? You know I could not control my heart—no one can do that."

He looked at her a little suspiciously, but could see nothing but innocence and earnestness in her up-raised face.

"Yes, I forgive you. If you love Bert well, I can forgive you for not loving me."

Then he left her, and as she stood looking after him, biting a corner of her full lower lip, there was much of anger and something of regret on her pretty face.

Bertram, like an impatient lover, urged a speedy marriage, and easily secured his own way. In a few short weeks the marriage bells were ringing. It was a quiet affair, by mutual consent. The bride was a vision of loveliness. The bridegroom was earnest, and a little pale. The best man was calm, and a little paler. And so the irrevocable deed was done, and a few hours later Mr. and Mrs. Bertram Osborne were on their way to the Cumberland lakes.

From thence the happy pair were summoned home within a fortnight of their stay by the receipt of a telegram from Conway, short but imperative.—"Come home at once. Our father is dying."

It was strangely and terribly sudden. Mr. Osborne had gone forth for his daily walk in apparently as good condition as he had been for years. He had been seen erect and firm by some of the villagers, and had received the respectful salutations of several of his tenants with his usual cold courtesy. But he had surprised the old woman who kept the lodge gate by asking her for the loan of a walking-stick, and when Conway met his father in the hall a little later he was inexpressibly shocked.

"Why do you look at me like that?" asked Mr. Osborne, irritably.

Receiving no reply he supported himself to a mirror, and saw the reflection of a face grotesquely distorted and twisted on one side. The effect upon him was singular; he burst into an hysterical laugh. An hour afterwards Mr. Osborne was in bed and unconscious. "A

stroke of paralysis," said the doctor; "not a very severe one, but the story I fear has a sequel."

The doctor was right. Mr. Osborne had a second and severer stroke, after which he never regained consciousness. He died the day after Bertram's return.

The brothers were shocked and grieved, but their father had ever shown such a lack of affection for them that their sorrow could not be expected to be so deep and lasting as it might otherwise have been. Una wept copiously; partly because she hated events of a dismal character, partly because she thought she should look hideous in black, and the rest for the sake of appearances. But when, upon trial, she found that black was most becoming to her, acting as a capital foil to her gold hair and forget-me-not eyes, she was consoled.

But the world wags on despite the sweeps of the reaper's scythe. Bertram had his politics to attend to, and Una was burning to renew her acquaintance with fashionable life: not now as the pretty daughter of a poor parson, but as the wife of a landed proprietor of ancient name, with a rent-roll of six thousand a year. And so the Ferns was deserted for South Kensington. Conway, whose portion was thirty thousand pounds in the funds, also took up his residence in London for the present, partly because he had nothing better to do, and partly because he wanted to be near his brother. He refused a pressing invitation to stay at the house in Kensington, preferring to set up bachelor "diggings" of his own; but the brothers saw each other daily, and were as inseparable as ever.

Una made her second bow to society under the wing of Aunt Rachel, and was an immediate and decided success. She was beautiful, original and piquante; her husband was regarded as a coming man, sufficiently wealthy for a young commoner of ability, and Aunt Rachel's introduction was all-powerful.

Elated with her success, Una gave herself up wholly to enjoyment. Her dream of happiness was realised; at least she thought it was.

Some months had passed away when one evening in the wane of the season, Conway found himself alone with Una. His love for her having long since died out, or been self-slain, he had not avoided such an event. But on that evening he lamented his want of caution, for Una persisted in bringing the conversation round to the days when they had first known each other, before she had seen Bertram.

"You couldn't have loved me so very much after all, Con."

"Oh, no. A boy's fancy, very ardent and very brief. Are you going to Lady Lessington's garden party to-morrow?"

"No; you couldn't have loved me very much, or you would have told Bertram, and then things would have been very—different."

"Very different," replied Conway. "You would not have been my sister. I think I'll run down to the House and see what Bert is doing."

"If I had not been your sister I might have been your—wife," she

murmured, in a tone which left it doubtful whether she was in jest or earnest.

Conway reddened. It was a subject that it was not in his nature to jest upon; and if she was in earnest—but that was a thought he would not entertain for a moment.

"You showed me plainly enough that you never desired that honour, and I never cared for you sufficiently to ask you twice," he said, rudely.

"Con, you are telling an untruth."

She was looking him straight in the face, a look which made him turn pale and tremble. Una was deliberately trifling with him; perhaps only for vanity's sake; but, in any case, it was terribly bad—she was his brother's wife.

"I never tell an untruth," he said, rising in anger, and a few moments after he had left the house.

As Conway walked rapidly away his heart was in a tumult. "Fool that I was," he thought, bitterly, "not to have told him that she was heartless and shallow, unworthy of any true man's love. Oh, Bert, Bert!"

Meanwhile Una, with a strange, unpleasant light in her eyes, had sunk into a chair with an unmusical laugh.

"He is a fool," she purred softly. Then she set her white teeth fiercely, and added: "I hate fools!"

A few days afterwards the brothers were alone together in Bertram's sanctum. Conway sat in an easy-chair puffing at a cigar, while the master of the house stood with his back to the fireplace and his hands behind him, with the palms turned towards the grate; but there was no glow to the cigar, and the fire in the grate had been suffered to go out. The most unobservant onlooker, with any knowledge of the two young men, would have detected something very unusual in the atmosphere—an uneasiness and unpleasant constraint. Bertram's brow was moody and preoccupied, and on the handsome face of the younger brother, notwithstanding his easy attitude, there was perplexity and anxiety.

"Bert," said the latter, breaking a long silence, "there's no use trying to disguise it from me, something has gone wrong with you. Tell me all about it. You never keep secrets from me."

"Have you ever kept any from me?" asked Bertram, meaningly.

"Not worthy of the telling," replied Conway, colouring slightly. Then to cover his confusion he went on quickly: "It is some political worry I suppose. I'm sure politics must be a disappointing pursuit—when you gain the prizes you'll find them Dead Sea fruit. Perhaps you are tasting the bitterness already. Is that it? Tell me the trouble, old fellow, whatever it is."

Bertram shifted uneasily, and made a nervous attempt to clear his throat. Then, looking at the carpet, at the window, at the book-

shelves, at the marble statuette of Psyche, at the painting of Una in a great garden hat which hung over his bureau—anywhere but at his brother, he began :

"I *am* upset, because I have something to say to you that I would give years of my life to avoid saying. But my honour and your honour are at stake, and it must be said. The fact is, Con" (how painfully he stumbled over that dear old familiar name), "I'd rather you didn't come to the house again."

He paused and moistened his dry lips. Conway, deadly pale, sat as if frozen to stone.

"Not come to the house again?" he repeated, in a low, enquiring voice. But he saw it all: saw the deception that had been at work to separate him from his brother.

"No, it would be better not," replied Bertram. "Of course we can see as much of each other as ever elsewhere; because after all we are brothers, and—and have always been chums."

"How little you know me," said Conway, with a strange calmness, "to think that I could accept such a proposal. And how little I can have known you, when I would have staked my life you would never have made it to me. But, as you have enlightened me, I must enlighten you. I declare now before God, Who knows how clear of offence my heart is, that I neither understand nor will accept any half measures. You and I, Bert, must be the same brothers," here his voice trembled in spite of him, "we have always been, or—strangers."

"Don't say that, Con!" exclaimed his brother, greatly distressed. "I have tried to speak gently and kindly, for my affection for you is as strong as ever. But, oh! why did you not tell me that you had loved Una?"

"Because I saw how much you were bound up in her, and I feared to upset your happiness. I may have been wrong—I see now that I was—but my motives were good. And my love was but passing; it died at the birth of yours. Never from that moment have I felt anything for her but the regard of a brother. You believe that, don't you, Bert?"

"Una has told me all," replied the other, evasively. "The poor child was bitterly distressed."

"You believe me, don't you?" persisted Conway.

"The best of us are, after all, but human, and however strong our sense of honour may be, it is better to avoid ——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Conway, rising from his chair. He knew that a lie had robbed him of his brother's confidence, and of more than half his love; but of the author of that lie he would say nothing. "You avoid giving me an answer, because you believe an honest one would give me pain. But I'd rather have the honesty and the pain than your horrible doubting evasion. In all the past years have I ever been false to you? Have you ever seen a false look on my face, heard a false ring in my voice, felt a false grip of my hand?

No! Then why doubt me now? I want to hear from you the words, 'Con, I believe you.' I demand them!"

Pale and gloomy, Bertram remained silent, gazing unconsciously over at the picture of his wife. Twice he moved his lips as if to speak; but no words came.

For fully a minute—ah! what a minute!—Conway stood looking at him, awaiting a reply. As the clock on the mantelpiece ticked the seconds away his face became more and more ashen, and the moisture of mental agony gathered on his forehead. At last he said, in low husky tones:

"Your silence is more than sufficient. We are brothers no longer." Then he turned, and with his heart blighted and cold, left his brother's house.

Just six months after the breaking of that companionship which only the influence of a woman could have severed, during which nothing had been seen or heard of Conway, Una and Bertram were in Paris. Bertram was looking pale and haggard. "Overwork," his medical adviser had said, and recommended a change, and Una had greedily seized the opportunity of persuading her husband into a visit to the City of Pleasure.

One morning Bertram was strolling aimlessly in the Champs Elysées, occasionally stopping to look in the shop windows, when he suddenly met his brother face to face. Both paused instinctively. To pass an erstwhile dear friend and companion with cold composure requires long practice. In that moment each of the brothers must have seen how the other had changed, and have read the cause; have understood that if such a love as theirs could die, how hard and lingering a death it must be.

It was a fateful moment. The future hung upon a slender thread. A look, a word, and they would have been re-united. The yearning love was there, and the longing to forget and forgive. But pride was also there, lurking secretly in each heart. Each waited for an advance from the other; and so, alas! the heaven-sent moment passed. Conway suddenly turned and crossed the road, and with a bitter wail of regret and self-reproach in his heart Bertram passed on his way.

They heard a little of Conway after that. There came whispers of terrible dissipation in various Continental towns. He had desperately wounded a Prussian officer in a duel. He had broken the bank at Monte Carlo. (Bah! the bank is never broken!) Then the bank had broken him. After that they heard no more.

IV.

Far away in the heart of Queensland, that great half explored country which has acquired among Australians the dreamily sugges-

tive name of the "never never land," two shepherds dwelt on the banks of a river which bordered an endless plain. Shepherding, in its old-world signification, is suggestive of green, soft pastures, clear, rippling brooks, a small flock of fat, contented-looking sheep with gentle eyes and thick, silky wool and sportive lambs, tended and guided by one who carries a crook and is picturesque, and who weaves garlands of sweet-smelling clover.

But very far removed from such an occupation as that was the shepherding known to these world-forgotten men.

A succession of hot, rainless seasons had withered the once fertile plain, scorched the trees on its border, and licked up the shallow, sluggish waters of the river, leaving but an irregular chain of dark, pestilential pools in which rotted the body of many a starved, thirst-slain animal. Hundreds of miserable, wasted sheep lay panting with extended tongues on arid, dusty ground, or wandered listlessly about, dragging up the thick, yellow grass roots. Among a small clump of trees behind the shepherd's bark hut there was a very Golgotha. Scores of dying lambs had crawled to that poor shade, and there left their bones. And on all the lurid sun glared with relentless ferocity, and the burning heat was reflected back from the stricken plain into an opaque and brassy sky.

The two men who occupied the hut: one stretched on a sheepskin, his head supported on a folded coat, and the other sitting on the ground against the bark wall: were both young, and had been delicately nurtured. There was but little difference between their stories: the old story of dissipation ending in ruin. Then, when all was gone but pride and courage, the old world had been forsaken for the new. They belonged in a word to that too numerous class of "failures," the more courageous and independent of which prefer a hard, rough livelihood abroad to a comparatively easy existence of polite mendicity at home. To such hardy "failures" the Colonies owe not a little of their backbone.

The man who sat against the wall was the older and slighter of the two. He had dark blue eyes and brown hair, and his face was tanned and half hidden by a short beard which grew high on his cheek bones. His companion was a tall, grandly-built man, or rather the battered wreck of such a one. His form was wasted; his gold-brown beard was wild and unkempt; his cheeks were hollow and his eyes were dull. The former was Richard Bell, a younger son of a titled Ulster family in the male members of which wildness was hereditary. His companion was Conway Osborne.

Conway had been in the Colonies for nearly four years, during which he might have worked his way a considerable distance on the road to prosperity. But he was no ordinary "failure;" his downfall was due to no ordinary causes. His disposition had not sufficient lightness and elasticity to admit of his forgetting. With all his splendid manhood his heart was as a woman's—tender, sensitive, and single—

and the estrangement from his brother was slowly but surely breaking it.

He had lost the power of concentrating his energies, and was consumed by an external restlessness. His Australian wanderings had commenced in Victoria, where his recklessness and self-neglect had resulted in a severe attack of rheumatic fever which prostrated him for many weeks, and from the effects of which he never wholly recovered.

In the back blocks of New South Wales he had known both hunger and thirst, and had suffered from sunstroke. Further and further north he aimlessly drifted, until he crossed the border into Queensland during one of the severest droughts the country had ever experienced. The whole colony was suffering under the distress; pastoral and agricultural interests were dead and labour was at a premium. A great squatter king, whose monthly losses at that time might have been reckoned by thousands, sent Conway to try and find water and grass for some of his flocks. His mission was to save as many as he could, and Richard Bell was sent to assist him in that weary task.

Conway had been thus situated, seventy miles from the nearest habitation of man and ninety from a township, for three or four months, when two things happened to him.

He was stricken with a lingering, decaying illness—the combined result of rheumatic fever, sunstroke, exposure, heat, impure water, and hard fare at a time when nature demanded gentle nourishment—and an old copy of a Brisbane newspaper was left in his hands by a passing traveller. Almost the first words to meet his eyes when he opened the tattered, discoloured paper, were these :—

"CONWAY OSBORNE is earnestly beseeched to send his address to his brother at the Ferns, Herts., England."

Upon reading that advertisement Conway had not hesitated a moment. There was now a possibility of that for which he had been pining for years—a reconciliation with his brother. He had no materials for writing, and he was too weak for the fatigue of a ninety miles' ride into Charters Towers, the nearest township. But Dick Bell had gladly undertaken the journey, and posted to Bertram a slip of paper simply containing an address—Conway Osborne, Post Office, Charters Towers, Queensland.

It was of the expected letter from home that the two men were now talking. Conway was endeavouring to persuade his companion: who had ridden into Charters Towers but three weeks before for a fresh supply of tobacco, matches, tea, and other necessaries, and had found no letter waiting at the Post Office: to make the journey again.

"I don't see the faintest probability of a letter arriving for another week or two," reasoned Dick. "It's scarcely four months since we sent the address."

"It is exactly four months and three days," replied Conway. "I've

counted every hour of the time. Do go, mate. I dreamt last night that there was a letter."

"You dream that every night, I believe," said the other, smiling compassionately. "I'd go in a moment, old fellow, if you were yourself; I'd ride five hundred miles for a letter that would set your mind at rest. But you're still so seedy that I hate to leave you alone."

"But see how much better I've been lately!" cried Conway, eagerly. "I've been knocking about the place to-day, walking as straight and as firm as an emu. Dick, I feel sure there's a letter, and that it will be the making of me. You know very well that it's not the weakness and the pain in my bones that keep me down. Take my mare; she's bony enough, poor beast, but she's in better condition than your nag. There's plenty of 'damper' to last me, and you can leave both the 'billies' full of cold tea, in case I don't feel up to making it; and with two or three figs of tobacco I'll be as jolly as a sandboy. Now you'll go for me, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll go, old fellow," said Dick, after a thoughtful pause. "And I'll bring either a letter or a doctor," he added to himself.

Two hours afterwards Conway was alone; alone in the parched desert with the starving flocks, unseen by any but the All-seeing Eye; alone in the atmosphere which stirred but to burn; enveloped in a silence which was rendered more startlingly impressive by the occasional fretful yelp of a dog, or the low plaintive baa of a dying sheep. To a dweller in cities such solitude would have been appalling, but Conway had grown used to it.

After Dick had gone he felt more cheerful than he had felt for months. Unusually free from the gnawing rheumatic pains, and with the hope in his heart as a sedative, he slept that night long and dreamlessly. In the morning he walked out for a little among the suffering animals, but the implacable heat soon drove him back to the shelter of the hut. There he lay for hours dreamily thinking, a little of the future, but more of the past. His thoughts dwelt in the far distant happy days when he and Bert had been all in all to each other. For it was Bert, always Bert! They were children again at the Ferns, wild, neglected children, delighting in the chasing of butterflies and the seizure of birds' nests. And if, after a hard day's sport he was tired, Bert took his hand and helped him home. They were boys at school again, and Bert helped him over the donkey's bridges which beset the path of the youthful student, while he pounded the bullies into jelly. He laughed aloud—so loud that a sheep dog that lay in the doorway looked up in undisguised wonder—as in spirit he again thrashed the bargeman at Oxford; and in his solitude he was merry over their doings on the Continent.

When he came to their first parting, and his meeting with Una, he arrested his thoughts by an effort of will. He would have none of that period, and of the weary days and years of pain that had followed. He would turn down those ill-written leaves, and set a great seal upon

them. Rather let him go back to the beginning, and dream his dream over again, finding out, and dwelling upon the thousand little interesting incidents which, in the rush of thought, had been neglected.

In such dreaming the first two days of Conway's loneliness passed unheeded.

During the afternoon of the third day there came an unexpected but blessed visitor. A small cloud arose in the eastern horizon; light and fleecy at first, but it rapidly grew until the heavens were hid in darkness. Then the lightning flashed and the thunder rumbled in the west, and a few great drops of rain were succeeded by a heavy downpour.

It was but a passing tropical shower of not more than an hour's duration; but the elements work vigorously in those climes, and by the time the clouds had rolled away, leaving the sky perfectly spotless, and the sun had come out again with unabated intensity, what had been dust was mud, and the pools in the river beds had grown larger and gained much in purity. The delighted dogs rolled in the cool, wet mud, the lean sheep baaed their gratitude to heaven, and the insects in the trees that had been long silent chirped a glad chorus.

Conway walked out in the shower, and took comfort in getting wet. When he returned to the hut he found his sheepskin lying in a pool of water. An old bark roof that has borne a tropical sun for many months cannot be expected to remain waterproof. The young man's imprudence in getting wet and allowing his clothes to dry on him was rewarded in the evening by a return of the rheumatic pains, during the night by sleeplessness, and in the morning by symptoms of fever.

In the meantime Dick had arrived at Charters Towers within fifty hours of leaving the hut. He found to his intense disappointment that there was no letter for his mate. But, learning from the postmaster that the English mail was due in Brisbane that day, and that packets by it would reach Charters Towers only thirty hours later, he determined to wait on the chance of there being a letter for Conway. In any case, his horse required a good rest before commencing the return journey. An accident on the railway line and a breakdown of the coach occasioned a delay of a full day in the arrivals of the mails at Charters Towers; but Dick felt he was amply compensated when a letter was handed him directed to Conway Osborne.

Then he lost no time in starting for home; and as he had been away for many hours longer than he had intended, he urged the mare to her best pace. When he arrived in sight of the hut he expected to see Conway looking out for him; but in that he was disappointed, and the anxiety he had felt, but tried to stifle on the road was greatly increased. As he dismounted in the rear of the hut, he heard his mate's voice within, and both words and tone half awed and wholly alarmed him.

"Oh, why does he delay? Dick would not desert me—but he may have fallen on the road, and I shall die alone. God help me, and keep my senses from failing.

"Where shall we go for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year,
When the burnt-up banks are yellow and sad,
When the boughs are yellow and sere?"

The poor fellow was trying to allay the mental anguish, and to keep his brain from wandering, by repeating fragments of a poem by a bushman, who in Victoria had been his friend.

"Dick, you've been a good, true mate; but if you don't come soon and bring Bert's letter ——"

"Where are the old ones that once we had,
And where are the new ones near?
What shall we do for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year?"

"We're chums again, Bert and I, though the ocean rolls between us; and perhaps we'll take Dick into partnership, if he doesn't stay too long."

"But I go where last year's lost leaves go
At the falling of the year."

"Ah! Dick at last, thank God!" he exclaimed, as his mate appeared in the doorway. "And—yes, I see it in your face—you've brought me the letter."

He tried to rise to a sitting posture, but fell back heavily again on the sheepskin. Dick saw that his eyes were hollower than ever, and lit with an unnatural brilliancy, and a chill of fear struck his heart.

"Yes, I've brought your letter, and some medicine and brandy," he said, with a hopeless attempt to speak lightly. "I see you've not been taking care of yourself, and I must start to nurse you at once."

"Give me the letter, Dick," demanded the sick man, hungrily.

When it was placed in his hands, he gazed with dim, fond eyes at the well-remembered handwriting, and while Dick gently raised his pillow by adding a saddle cloth, he covertly kissed the envelope.

"Open it for me," he pleaded, for his hands were trembling like an aspen leaf.

When he had performed this service, and given the sufferer some brandy, Dick walked out of the hut to leave the brothers together, and stood in the sun, gazing at the distant mirage but seeing nothing but a red darkness. Presently he heard the weak voice calling him.

"It's no use, Dick. I can't read it. I can scarcely see. You are so good—read it for me."

Then Dick, the wild, intractable Dick Bell, sat on the ground by

his friend's side, and, spreading out the letter, read in a husky and oft-broken voice :

"THE FERNS, 27 October, 188—

"MY DEAR, LONG LOST BROTHER AND CHUM,—Ever since I last heard of you, I have been instituting unceasing enquiries, and making every effort to find you, for I feared that, having lost your fortune, you might be in want of the necessary, which I might possibly have the happiness of conveying to you in secret. But for the last twenty months, in particular, the impossibility of seeing you, and of holding your hand and imploring your forgiveness, has been a torture to me by night and day: for during that time I have known how deeply I have injured you.

"At last I heard that you had been seen and recognised in a country town in New South Wales, and then I directed that the advertisement, which I conclude you must have seen, although the address sent was not in your handwriting, should be inserted in all the Australian papers. When I received that address I almost decided to go to you instead of writing; but I thought it possible that you would see in the advertisement my longing to beg your forgiveness, and that your grand old brotherly heart being willing to take me back, you might have started for England; in which case I should have missed you. And so I have stayed at home at the Ferns waiting for you. But if it turns out that the mountain won't come to Mahomet—to effect which I enclose a bank draft in case you have not struck gold in Australia—then, most assuredly, Mahomet will go to the mountain.

"It was only on her death-bed that Una opened my eyes, and showed me how you and I had been parted by a lie. She died last Christmas year of inflammation of the lungs, brought on by a cold neglected in her mad race after pleasure. She could not have loved me very much, the poor child's nature was too vain and shallow. Her wickedness has given us years of pain, but if you will forgive my iniquity in doubting you—which must remain a life-long reproach within me—and take me back as your 'old chum' again, we will deal gently with her memory, Con, for God knows what imperfect creatures we all are.

"You will come back to me, Con; I know you will. Only one doubt—the shame of it burns me as I write—has ever come between us, and it was mine. But as you read this your brother's fault is forgiven. You are taught to forgive him seventy times—his one offence was equal to seventy; but your heart's forgiveness is big enough to cover it, and he will offend no more. Come to me; come to me without a moment's delay. I shall be counting each hour. Come to me, Con; I cannot live apart from you longer. All my old interests have been abandoned, and at thirty, without you, I am an old man.

"This is written in our old 'barrack;' there are two guns of yours on the wall, and a fishing-rod standing in the corner over there. The

covers are teeming with partridges, and the stream is alive with trout. Make haste, old fellow, and come home! See here, I have a jar at hand of tobacco, our own particular mixture—your invention, you remember, at Oxford. Happy thought! we'll smoke a loving pipe together. There! I've charged my brier with it, and rolled up a pipeful in silver paper, which I'll flatten out and enclose with this letter. I fear it will be dust when it reaches you, but never mind that. Put it in your pipe and say, 'Old Bert has behaved like a scoundrel to me, but I bury my just resentment and from my soul forgive him, and with him now I smoke the Pipe of Peace.' And when you have smoked it faithfully out, start up and come to me.

"And may Almighty God bless you, and guide you in safety home to

"Your ever remorseful, but ever loving
"Brother and friend,
"BERT OSBORNE."

As Dick finished reading he caught his breath in an irrepressible sob. Conway had listened with his face concealed by his poor wasted hands, weeping silently like a weary child.

"My pipe, Dick." And Dick knowing what was required of him, carefully opened the little silver paper, and poured the dry, dusty tobacco it contained into his mate's well-used clay pipe, pausing once in the delicate task to brush the blinding moisture from his sight with the back of his brown hand. Then he knelt on the ground, gently raised his companion, and, supporting him with one strong arm, gave him the pipe and struck a light for him. Weakly but eagerly Conway drew the smoke from the pipe of peace, and weakly and brokenly, but oh! so earnestly, he spoke to his mate the while.

"Tell him—I smoked it, Dick—for you must go—and tell him everything——I know—you'll go, Dick—I don't want your word—you're so good—next in my heart—to my brother. He'll be—your friend. Tell him—how much I forgave him—as God—will forgive me—and how much—how much I loved him——The partnership's broken—but only for a time——Dick, true mate—it's not very hard."

The pipe of peace so faithfully and lovingly smoked fell from his hand, and more heavily the dying man lay in the arms of his sobbing friend.

"Bert—there you are—dear old fellow. You'll like Dick—and perhaps talk of me——I've smoked it all—right out—and we're—old chums again—Bert—real—dear—old chums for ever."

A great, long-drawn sigh, and the tired life slipped away. And of the angels who came down to meet the brave, chastened spirit, some must have lingered about the lonely man whose heart was purified by grief and love.

J. OGDEN AND CO., PRINTERS, 172, ST. JOHN STREET, E.C.

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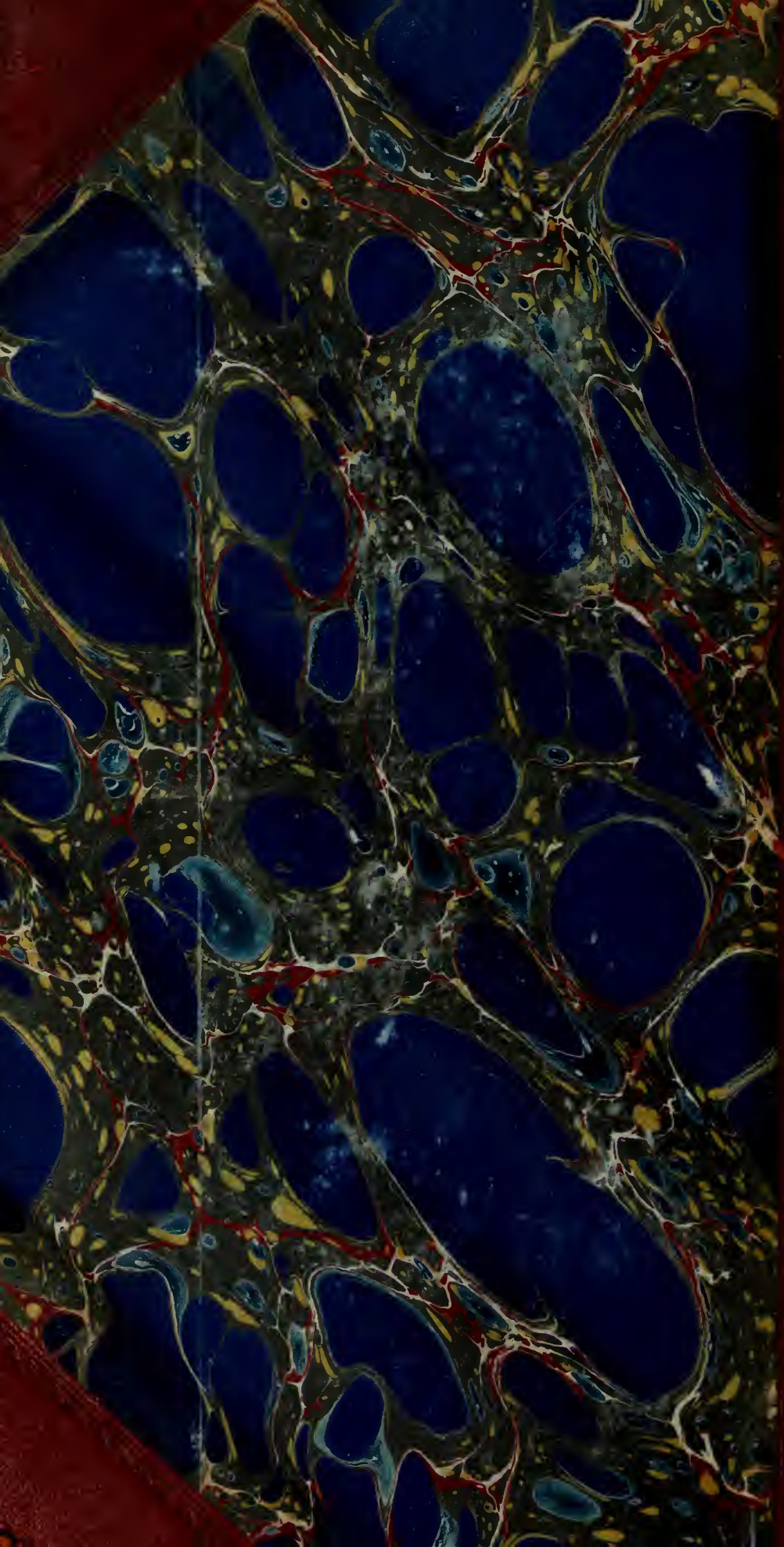
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